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*A model and theory of community-based
arts and health practice*

Anni Raw

Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the dynamic world of a hidden arts and health practice. Throughout the UK, and internationally, artists are engaged to work collaboratively with community groups, in creative initiatives seeking positive outcomes for participants' health and wellbeing. Their practice is informal in character, with no unified identity or agreed parameters; instead responsive individuality in methods, manifest in the idiosyncratic creative voices of practitioners, is much celebrated. However elusive, improvised or plan-resistant the mechanisms behind the work, such projects continue to be resourced, constituting a paradoxically unregulated phenomenon in a customarily risk-averse health and care context.

Investigating the inner workings of expert participatory arts practitioners' methods, the thesis asks whether shared elements can be identified, forming a coherent model that characterises and unifies this work. Noting the value of exploring two entirely discreet settings, with field sites across Northern England as well as across Mexico City, I use international comparison to investigate whether the practice furthermore displays commonalities that transcend national contextual differences.

Despite significant diversity in settings and art forms, and in practitioners' backgrounds, the study finds recurrent commonalities in the methodologies engaged. The thesis articulates these findings as a coherent practice model, comprising elements recognisable amongst all practitioners in the study. Observing shared characteristics in practitioners' intuitive strategies for catalysing change, through the use of generic creative mechanisms including subversive playfulness, risk, and suspension of disbelief, I theorise the practice model using an anthropological lens of secular ritual. Artists' processes suggest they open up 'liminal' spaces in which participants can rehearse fresh ways of being themselves, and engage in transformative reflection on their everyday realities. This discovery of a breadth of practitioners, whose intuitive practice transcends boundaries in artform, context and national identity, is discussed here as an emergent, 'cosmopolitan' community of practice.

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Anni Raw

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
(Social Sciences and Health Interdisciplinary Doctorate)

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2013

'Like the grit in the Oyster!'



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Acknowledgements

A practical acknowledgement

The three study years to produce this thesis were generously supported by a fully funded interdisciplinary doctoral studentship from Durham University Faculty of Social Sciences and Health. I was fortunate in receiving two Santander Mobility awards enabling travel to Mexico, and was granted additional support from the Wellcome Foundation in bursaries for travel and equipment, as well as a Faculty of Social Sciences and Health PhD projects bursary, and bursaries from the Wolfson Research Institute, the Department of Anthropology and the School of Medicine, Pharmacy and Health, for travel to present my research at conferences. The financial support and repeated votes of confidence provided by these grants have been fundamental in enabling me to complete this PhD, and the time and focus the studentship allowed me has been a great privilege.

A personal acknowledgement

I am deeply indebted in myriad ways, too many to mention, to everyone who has given their own energy and generosity to supporting and enriching this study: my three supervisors, other academic colleagues, arts practitioners, compañeros and friends, here in the UK and in Mexico. A work like this comes about through the sincerity, commitment and vibrancy of many people, and I hope it honours the individual trust and creativity offered so freely to the process by so many contributors. It has been exhilarating to be at the heart of an unfolding story with so vivid a caste of characters, and with a dynamic momentum fed by the enthusiasm of everyone involved. My heartfelt thanks for your invaluable contributions:

It takes the wind and a whole sky for a kite to fly.

Part One:

Starting point

As the parade winds its way across the wasteland beside the school, and then round the streets of the local housing estate, smiling faces come to upstairs windows, some people waving, and others collect in family groups to look out of doorways, puffing out clouds of white breath in the dark air. At one point I catch up with Mary, who is walking towards the front of the snaking line, at intervals glancing a watchful eye backwards across the moving heads. I step outside the parade and count all the lantern structures as they pass – 103, which are those I can see lit up. There are also many glittering stars held high by smaller children. I guess there may be 450 people, from very tiny to very large! Mary is smiley and involved, skipping with children, congratulating families on the effectiveness of their designs (a boat made by one family, a dinosaur, and a dragon made by another). She is particularly attentive to the incomer families, one from Sri Lanka with whom she is extremely affectionate and open, another an African family (the father is by far the tallest person in the parade, and is almost dancing along with his partner and children, smiling broadly). They have several lanterns between them, all beautifully made, and Mary's appreciation of their hard work and the stunning illuminated shapes they've created feels genuine; and is very warmly received: 'Awww, LOOK at THAT, it's fanTAStic isn't it? It's turned out really well! Well done team!!' [original vocal inflections indicated]. Even though the air is cold, the parade feels compact and cheerful, and hence warm. Occasionally I wonder how it looks and feels to the people who are looking on from outside. It might seem a bit too cheerful, perhaps a bit giddy. I wonder whether anyone feels confused by it, or excluded, or irritated. It's certainly a big event on a cold, dark evening, in a community that is not short of its daily challenges ... There

are more teenagers attached to the parade this year than previously. The leading police car is constantly mobbed by a swarm of lads on scooters, seemingly unable to resist the opportunity to get as close as possible with reckless manoeuvres – harmless, but cheeky! I fall in with Karla (10), whom I've met each year I've been here, and she asks me to join her, carrying her enormous Harry Potter lantern. She is so open, so proud of her lantern, very chatty. We skip to the beat of the samba band, with Harry aloft ... When we all finally arrive back at the school playground Mary and Gilly organise the laying out of the lanterns – creating a scene reminiscent of an illuminated model village. Cheers, claps and whoops resound across the playground in appreciation of their efforts.

(Field notes, UK, 2/2/12)



Figure 1.1: 'Tilery Lanterns', photo of same event in the previous year, 4/2/11

Chapter 1

Introducing the Territory

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the dynamic world of a hidden creative practice. Over the period of recent decades (and probably much longer), in numerous communities in different countries across the globe (Clift, Camic, & Daykin, 2010), arts practitioners from across the broad spectrum of art form disciplines have been working closely with groups of local people, in often low-key but highly engaging and idiosyncratic participatory arts projects. These practitioners have been using their artistic expertise to create work collaboratively with project participants, seeking through these creative collaborations to catalyse processes of change or renewal within their host communities. At local policy level those with responsibility for development and inclusion agendas in health, education and community settings have increasingly enlisted the contribution of such arts practitioners or artist teams in their strategies (Clift et al., 2009; Rosas Mantecón, 2011; White, 2009, 2010). With growing stakeholder enthusiasm for engaging artists to work in this way, particularly in disadvantaged areas or with marginalised communities facing complex life challenges, my main research questions ask: What is it that these arts practitioners are doing? *How* do they work, how do they do what they do? Thus my study explores the inner workings of these practitioners' activities.

To consider this question I immersed myself in the liminoid spaces that such practice opens up, embracing field sites across northern England as well as in the

geographically distant and apparently different setting of Mexico City. Taking a comparative view, I sought to explore the extent to which artists' responses were idiosyncratic and specific to context, or whether practices in different settings and under different conditions might share common characteristics, suggesting the existence of a hitherto unrecognised cosmopolitan practice, and community of cosmopolitan practitioners. The result of this ethnographic study is the development of a new conceptualisation of a unified, commonly recognisable model of participatory arts practice – a model I describe as a 'practice assemblage' – which characterises the practice of all the practitioners who took part in this study.

My exploration found an intriguing world characterised by paradox and duality, in which the arts practitioners perform an accomplished, intuitive balancing act between the visible and the subversive, being expert at an interstitial existence and playing comfortably with the tensions inherent in their position. As one contributor commented:

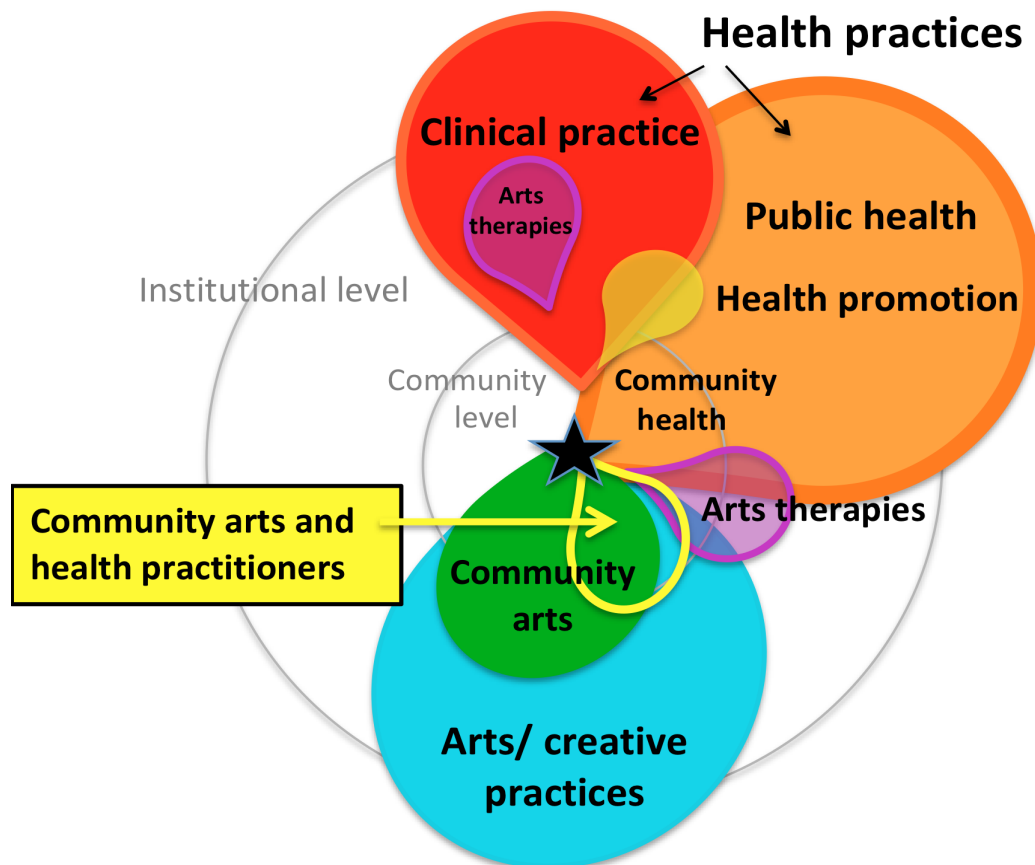
It's what we always say, isn't it? We're like the grit in the oyster!

(Lou, group discussion 3, UK, 19/8/11)

I have a background in this same arts world, with a long fascination for the points at which the fires of art and creativity meet the passion to combat social injustice. My research questions have thus had many years of gestation. I have been curious to know how (and indeed whether) artists working at this interface were conceiving their agency. My thesis therefore explores how these practitioners construct their methods, how they decide on strategies, and where their ideas come from. I have sought to illuminate the inner workings of an emergent creative practice, and to delineate it as a visible, distinct methodology; amongst other better recognised, closely related approaches to community wellbeing and health. Figure 1.2 below offers a schematic diagram locating this practice amongst others in the UK context.

Although a community health-related activity, unlike the work of community health workers, teachers, youth workers, medics, arts therapists or other qualified and regulated professionals working in similar settings, the work studied here is not contained within a professional or regulatory framework. It is a practice with no agreed fundamental principles or delineated boundaries, no recognised title, or training framework by which to testify to the skills of artists, and hence no systematic quality assurance processes or parameters of practice.

Figure 1.2: Locating a hidden arts and health practice



Yet paradoxically, in a global policy world otherwise so focussed on evidence-based practice and so apparently risk-averse, the work continues to be commissioned. In the light of this paradox I took on the challenge to create new discourses on a shared language to describe the work, and perhaps to locate and affirm a set of shared principles (White, 2010; White & Robson, 2010), with which to delineate and articulate it, as a specialist practice or set of practices.

This, then, is the starting point for this thesis: to explore the inner workings of the unregulated and under-articulated practice of community-based, participatory artists, who work in arts and health and other community inclusion and development initiatives, with the aim of combatting the effects of ill health, disadvantage and inequalities, and enabling people and communities to flourish. I was interested in how this work – without a therapeutic or a pedagogic framework – seeks to facilitate change: positive developments in relation to project participants' health, wellbeing and capacity in their lives. This is, therefore, an exploration of neither a therapeutic nor a pedagogic but a creative framework for facilitating change.

The scope and limits of the study

This is an interdisciplinary field, demanding an interdisciplinary precept. However, with a subject that includes so many potential avenues of enquiry, clarity in the scope of the study has been essential. With this summary of the limits to the scope of the study I hope to assist the reader by clarifying the parameters of the investigation that follows. I have prioritised studying community-based, participatory arts practice as a phenomenon, and the characterisation of that phenomenon. I have not, as others have, focussed on the infrastructure of the community arts and health sector – the policy context, the organisations, agencies and partnerships commissioning and delivering the

work. Nor have I included research into the specific contextual conditions of the projects I have witnessed, on the premise that these conditions are infinitely variable, and present too great a distraction from an investigation of common themes in practice norms across a wide range of projects. Instead I have studied the practice occurring within the 'workshop' environment of these projects: an element which, my experience leads me to concur with Crehan, is in itself a defining feature of the approach (Crehan, 2011, pp. 182-184, 195).

The discussion here is not concerned with professional arts performances in healthcare or community settings, or with artworks or creative architecture used to enhance environments. It does not include the work of artists in clinical settings; for example, hospital clowns or music at the bedside. Although closely related, these phenomena fall outside the scope of my study, since I am interested in participatory arts engagement in community settings; that is, how artists work together with community groups and, through participating in the shared creative process of creating artwork together, open up possibilities for change.

Despite exploring work in projects seeking the improved wellbeing of participants, the focus of the thesis is not on artists who use therapeutic approaches, such as the clearly distinct practice of trained arts therapists (Dileo and Bradt, 2009). Those practitioners, 'backed up by their formal training, are often seeking psychotherapeutic outcomes' (Arts Council England, 2006, cited White, 2010), and their practice (having a specified knowledge base and specific training, an ethical code, and professional body with support structures for practitioners), is already professionalised. Neither is it the focus of this study to explore the outcomes of the practice I am investigating, since this is increasingly the subject of research elsewhere (as I will discuss in my literature review below). In contrast, I address a significant lacuna in the literature identified by numerous scholars, (Angus, 2002; Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Broderick, 2011; J. Carey, 2006; P. Carey & Sutton, 2004; Clift et al., 2009; Cohen, 2009; Dileo & Bradt, 2009; McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakers, & Brooks, 2004; Putland, 2008; Raw, Lewis, Russell, & Macnaughton, 2012; Sonke, Rollins, Brandman, & Graham-Pole,

2009; White, 2001, 2004b) by giving focussed attention to the workings of the practice itself.

Defining terms

In a field with such elusive parameters it is imperative that I clarify my usage of some key terms. My study focuses on *arts* not as a collective term for artistic objects, events, activities, creations, expressions or realisations, as such works exist in isolation, but rather on arts as a human experience (Dewey, 1959). The *arts activity* at the core of this study represents the arts experience of the makers (artists and community members) themselves, the creative experience, through which some form of art is produced. Arts activity of this kind instigates creative experiences that will be called the *creative process*. Thus the arts discussed in this thesis constitute an active, productive experience, a process in which a creative product – object, event, activity, creation, expression, process, realisation or change – stimulates a valuable reflective engagement with reality. As Goodman suggests:

Aesthetic experience is dynamic rather than static [...] the aesthetic 'attitude' is restless, searching, testing – is less attitude than action; creation and re-creation. (Goodman, 1976, pp. 241-242)

Throughout the thesis I refer not to artists but to *arts practitioners*. This is because the vast majority of the practitioners in my study, though they have an arts training, are uncomfortable with the term artist, for reasons I will explore later. Hence the arts practitioners are those artists in my study using their arts expertise to work creatively with others in workshops and projects, to offer or facilitate the arts activities and creative processes mentioned above.

Participatory is a term I often use in conjunction with arts; and the term is used liberally elsewhere to denote a range of forms of social and political engagement. In

relation to arts practices the precise connotations of the term are disputed, particularly with regard to the ownership of resulting art works, and the relationships between participants and artists (Almenberg, 2010; Bishop, 2006a). For purposes here I use the term with reference to engagement processes involving non-specialists (participants) in engaging creatively with specialists (the arts practitioners) to make artwork. The term describes a situation in which the specialists lead, to the extent of offering their specialist arts expertise to guide the process, and where their leadership in these situations is more collaborative than instructive.

The creative process focussed on here, then, is *participatory arts activity*, which (to distinguish it from the 'participatory art' processes described by Almenberg in his manifesto 'Notes on Participatory Art') is not an exploratory arts process as an art form in its own right, realised by the active, participatory interaction between spectator and exhibited work (Almenberg, 2010, pp. 5-11). The participatory arts activity in this study is the direct, workshop-based, collaborative association between projects participants and arts practitioners.

Practice is a concept which is central to the study, and is used here to refer to the way individuals execute their work, their methodology and methods. For the purposes of this thesis, I choose to avoid the complex discourses on practice and practice theory. Its use is thus purely descriptive of the ways in which practitioners work.

Non-professionalised practice is a term used here to differentiate the work of the practitioners in my study from those *professionalised* practices governed by a professional framework. The latter are indicated above as practices with a specified knowledge base and specific training, an ethical code or 'general rules governing professional conduct' (Downie & Telfer, 1980, p. 2), and professional body with support structures for practitioners. Hence I use the term *non-professionalised* in relation to community arts and health practitioners, to specify that this practice is unregulated, and with no such stipulations.

When discussing community I refer on the one hand to groups of people: a *community group* is a group of people who are together through sharing a geographical neighbourhood, or who are bound by a common attribute of challenge or disadvantage, such as a family bereavement, fleeing domestic violence, being out of work, suffering from depression, or experiencing social exclusion. The other use of community is as a synonym for place. *Community-based*, for the purposes of the thesis, means activity which is based – that is, takes place – in informal community settings rather than in formal institutions or clinical settings. Some venues in which community-based projects take place may be within an institution in a community setting – for example in a school. A small amount of the project work included in the thesis took place in the specific community of a penal institution, while the majority took place outside any institution, happening indoors, outdoors, and in a variety of different community-based venues where communities are to be found.

Health is a concept that I draw on, for example, in the term *arts and health*; my interpretation of the term draws on Marmot and Wilkinson's work on the 'social determinants of health' (Marmot, Wilkinson, & Brunner, 2006). This health paradigm takes a social perspective on the causes of ill-health, and therefore the health concept is drawn more widely than its clinical interpretation (as the absence of disease). For the purposes of this thesis, initiatives with a bearing on issues of social justice and inclusion, for example, or initiatives seeking to address emotional literacy, are health-related in that they address inequalities which cause ill-health, and which make wellbeing less achievable for certain groups. The communities referred to in the previous paragraph may face a range of health challenges. Social and economic disadvantage, as defined by Marmot, Wilkinson and Brunner (ibid), are challenges conceptualised within this health paradigm.

Navigation

This thesis comprises three parts. In Part One I present the context and research landscape of the study. This introduction is followed by a literature review in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 then narrates my research methodology and methods as a set of encounters that threw up a number of processual challenges, for which solutions had to be sought and my own practice as an ethnographer rapidly honed.

Part Two of the thesis gives a detailed report and discussion of the research findings, using ethnographic description and verbatim material. The chapters in Part Two deliver the exposition of the mid-level theory which emerges from the data, and which I later theorize in Part Three. A preamble introduces the mid-level theory of a 'practice assemblage', and Chapters 4-8 each focus on a distinct strand of findings, while 'Part Two Coda' offers a visual-conceptual recapitulation of the mid-level theory.

Part Three contextualizes and reflects upon the findings in Part Two. Firstly in Chapter 9 I reflect on my findings with reference to the theoretical terrains of several social sciences disciplines. I consider the relevance of a range of theories, seeking an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that can illuminate the 'practice assemblage' I have uncovered. Within the limited scope of the doctoral thesis, what I offer in this chapter is a first step in a much more ambitious endeavour. In Chapter 10 I take a step back to view the respective national contexts of the UK and Mexico, in which field research took place, and consider the influence of context upon the practice. Finally, in Chapter 11 I draw conclusions from my study, suggesting implications for both the practice and research fields.

Chapter 2

The Lay of the Land

This chapter locates the academic discourses that have thus far attempted to characterise or theorise the community-based practice of artists in participatory arts and health projects. Because this practice is non-professionalised and is poorly delineated, because it incorporates projects in diverse settings and working with art forms from across the full spectrum of disciplines, and because descriptions for it vary so widely, the search for existing literature on the subject was complex and lengthy.

Searching within the arts practice and art theory fields led to a wealth of literature unrelated to participatory or community arts – as well as a vast body of non-academic case studies detailing outcomes of participatory arts initiatives. This latter body of literature is evaluated by key reviewers as largely lacking theoretical analysis (Angus, 2002; Putland, 2008; Staricoff, 2004), and is often difficult to distinguish from the huge array of advocacy material that the sector routinely produces to argue its survival case amidst scarce resources (Angus, 2002); academic objectivity cannot therefore be assumed in this material.

Through more piecemeal searches (for example of academic study guides for arts courses) towards the end of my study, some of the most relevant

academic literature in the fields of arts practice came to light, some previously inaccessible due to the obscurity of their specialism, some appearing in print only during the latter stages of my research period (Almenberg, 2010; Helguera, 2011; Hepplewhite, 2013; Shaughnessy, 2012). An interesting body of literature was found under discourses on 'relational art' (Bishop, 2006a, 2006b; Bourriaud, 2002 [1988]; Broderick, 2011; Clements, 2011; Kester, 2004, 2011), 'applied' or 'community' theatre (A. Jackson, 2007; van Erven, 2001), 'community music' (Boyce-Tillman, 2009; Phelan, 2008) and 'performance studies' (Boal, 1979 [1974]; S. Jackson, 2011; Shaughnessy, 2012). Some of these scholars give attention to artists' methodologies, although few explore participatory arts mechanisms by which practitioners seek to facilitate processes collaboratively with project participants, often focussing instead on how artists seek to engage with audiences. A case in point is the above-mentioned discourse on 'relational art', to which the practice in my study is sometimes loosely ascribed (Bishop, 2006b). This literature discusses 'relational art' as a contemporary arts practice in which the work is authored by the artist, rather than remaining the collaborative work of the group and its participants. Hence the relational element forms part of the artists' development process in creating their own work (Bishop, 2006a, 2006b; Bourriaud, 2002 [1988]), and this distinguishes the approach from participatory arts practice as studied here. Presenting a perspective within contemporary arts practice theory that is more useful for my interest, Kester discusses political and ethical dimensions of 'activist and socially engaged' arts processes (Kester, 2011, pp. 59-65). Exploring contemporary examples internationally he locates an emphasis in the significance of situation ('place') in this work; he examines a blurring of boundaries between collaborative art processes and activism, while still

retaining a specific identity for the artist within the work. Taking a step back from the discourses on contemporary arts practice, Helguera comments on the speed of development of theoretical analysis – the situating and delineating of contingent ideas – while concluding that the discussion of the ‘technical components’, constituting what he finds is often referred to as ‘social practice’, has been ‘more pedestrian’ (Helguera, 2011, p. 16). His introductory, typological text demonstrates a very recent turning of attention towards the missing links between theory and practice in this developing field.

Investigating related territory using search terms “creativity”, and “community arts” brought mixed success. Much of the literature on creativity as a concept relates to the world of enquiry where business and management studies draw on psychology to explore innovation and leadership, or else focuses on creativity in teaching, and theories of pedagogical practice – none of which angles were useful as core literature in this research. Anthropological reflections on creativity (Gell, 1998; Hallam & Ingold, 2007; Hyde, 2007; 1993), while at first appearing interesting for their focus on processes and people, in the end only offered one study exploring participatory arts practice (Crehan, 2011), though this text (discussed below) has been extremely valuable. “Community arts” as a specific search term located texts from the field of cultural and development studies and cultural theory. This literature, while not concerned directly with participatory arts and health practices, offers further useful contextual and theoretical background (beyond the discussions framed by Kester mentioned above) to the work of participatory artists as agents of change in society. There is attention given to practitioners’ motives and their relationship to broader movements of social and political activism (Crehan, 2011; O. Kelly, 1984; Kupperts & Robertson, 2007; McKay, 2010; van Erven,

2001), which are themes picked up by my study. Finally within the academic literature of the arts and humanities field, a handful of recently published theses (Brown, 2006; Hills, 2006; Mwalwanda, 2009; S. Oliver, 2009; Stickley, 2008) touch on aspects of participatory arts practice; and though these pieces are seldom a close match with my inquiry, their appearance demonstrates, along with the even more recent publications mentioned above, the current burgeoning of academic interest in the study of arts and health practice.

Amongst the non-academic literature in the arts field, including the rich body of advocacy material, there are numerous artist forum discussions, and reflective practitioner accounts in which artists seek a deeper understanding of their own or their peers' developing practice. The material stored in the US 'Community Arts Network' archive, the Australian online resources 'Disseminate' and the archives of 'Community Cultural Development.net', and *Mailout* online magazine and archive in the UK, amongst many others worldwide, have produced insightful commentary and analysis over many years, seeking to better understand and demystify the work of artists in community and health contexts (Krafchek, 2008; A. Lewis & Doyle, 2008; Ohm, 2008; Yenawine, 2009). However, the frames of reference used in these practice-based discussions – even amongst the more analytical reflections – are rarely referenced to a theoretical arena: they aim at the practitioner or policy and strategic audience. Without the imperative to apply academic rigour to its research and reporting processes (Daykin, 2008) this body of work directly from the field could not provide high quality analysis for my study (Mays & Pope, 1995).

A body of academic literature reporting directly on participatory arts and health initiatives was found across an array of journals and University archives (Argyle & Bolton, 2005; Brinson et al., 1992; Clift & Hancox, 2010; Clift, Hancox,

et al., 2010; JW Davidson & Faulkner, 2010; Gould, 2005; Kagan & Kilroy, 2007; Kagan et al., 2005; Kilroy, Garner, Parkinson, Kagan, & Senior, 2007; Macnaughton, White, & Stacy, 2005; Matarasso, 1997; Rae, 2010; Rafferty, 2010; Sixsmith & Kagan, 2005; Stickley, 2008; White, 2001, 2009), and the recent academic journals 'Arts & Health' and 'Journal of Applied arts and Health'. The publications archive at my own base, Durham University's Centre for Medical Humanities, offers interesting pieces on arts and health initiatives, including scoping studies, evaluations and 'think pieces' (Everitt & Hamilton, 2003; Smith, 2001, 2003; White, 2004a, 2006; White & Angus, 2003) some of which I was able to draw on as foundation material. All the above studies, drawing on fascinating and diverse qualitative data sources – interviews, personal journals, focus group discussions, observation, project reflections – discuss projects appropriate to my research field, and have much to offer my study in terms of scoping and contextualising the practice field. However rather than stretching to theoretical analysis of the practice and of the role of the artists, they tend still to focus on simple descriptive reporting, and exploring the effectiveness of specific art forms in improving health in a wide range of ways.

Searching in the health field for research relating specifically to participatory arts interventions brought up only studies using experimental designs and scientific reporting strategies, to explore the impacts of arts interventions taking place within hospital or healthcare settings. Looking at impacts through the lens of a medical model in this way fails to offer my research the practice focus and broader social and emotional context I need, to understand the interdisciplinary approaches used by participatory artists. Within the health

literature the arts therapies, now firmly established as a health care approach in their own right (Pratt, 2004), provide the most common field for research into the application of arts and creative approaches to health and healing (over 1,400 article returns for “art therapy”, almost 1000 for “music therapy” and 130 for “dance therapy”). However the professionalised arts therapy practices fall outside the subject area of my study, which – as is clarified in the introduction – is focussing on the non-professionalised practice of artists, working outside any medical or therapeutic framework. So, while offering a useful backdrop to my own research subject, this literature provides analysis of a practice rooted in a different set of starting points and guiding principles.

Although the health related research arena could not offer much literature of direct relevance to a study of arts and health practice, there was however a host of research which explored the causes of ill health. This aspect of the health field is helpful for my study in clarifying the place of community-based participatory arts practice within a health paradigm. Marmot, champion of the concept of ‘the social determinants of health’, emphasises the importance of recognising patterns in health inequalities, in order to achieve better health outcomes for peoples, both nationally and internationally (Marmot, 2010; Marmot, Friel, Bell, Houweling, & Taylor, 2008; Marmot et al., 2006; Singh-Manoux, Adler, & Marmot, 2003; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). He uses Geoffrey Rose’s term ‘the causes of the causes’ of health inequalities to focus and justify research into the deeper foundations of ill health on both an individual and a population level (Marmot, 2005). Marmot and colleagues from the health and sociology research field (Pahl, 1999; Wilson, 1975) may make no specific mention of arts and health strategies to tackle health inequalities themselves, but this body of social health research is

regularly drawn upon in the key literature exploring arts and health (Broderick, 2011; Clift, Camic, et al., 2010; Macnaughton et al., 2005; Matarasso, 1997; Putland, 2008; Smith, 2003; White, 2009).

The fact that investigating the lay of the land for my study was so cumbersome highlights the disparate nature of 'arts and health' as an idea or group of associated ideas, and the resulting complexity and fragmentation of the academic framing and analysis of the field – such as it is to date. There is certainly no single home for the range of ideas relating to a participatory arts and health practice. Concepts such as arts, health, creativity, community, practice or participation are very differently understood by academics from different disciplines (Broderick, 2011), and conversely there are multiple terms across the range of arts and humanities, social science and health fields for the same or similar concept (Badham, 2010; Murray & Gray, 2008; Putland, 2008).

The realisation that a coherent theoretical discourse on the non-professionalised, community-based practice of participatory artists does not currently exist within the academic canon validates my own research focus for this doctoral study. The narrow range of relevant academic literature from within the arts and culture disciplines themselves from which to begin a discussion was very surprising, and points to the fascinating clutch of dichotomies, outlined further below, which appear to have plagued community arts and health practitioners (Brinson et al., 1992; O. Kelly, 1984) throughout the four decades of their visible activity. Different perspectives amongst these artists on their work and its identity may have prevented an outward looking,

theoretical debate developing (Clift et al., 2009; Phelan, 2008; Sonke et al., 2009). This thread will be explored in the main sections of the thesis.

Discourses Providing Context

Defining terms

Echoing the disparate nature of the academic field, the terminology itself for health related arts practice and its practitioners is fragmented and disputed, with a plethora of different names used and defended by different groups, both nationally and internationally. Two regularly highlighted obstacles to workable definitions are the immense breadth and diversity of arts and health practice, and the multidisciplinary nature of arts and health partnerships (Clift et al., 2009; Sonke et al., 2009; White, 2009). Mike White, who has written extensively on the development of arts practice applied in community health settings, lists in his seminal book five subtly distinct permutations of terminology: ‘arts in health’, ‘arts for health’, ‘arts into health’, ‘arts and health’, and ‘healing arts’ which, he notes, have different emphases, refer to subtly different approaches and denote different beliefs about health, ill-health and the place of arts practice in promoting health (White, 2009). Other authors have reported similar difficulty in finding a definitive terminology, and have called for urgent attention to resolving the confusion (Clift et al., 2009; Dileo & Bradt, 2009; Sonke et al., 2009). Such descriptive disunity and difference, I propose, can impact on the way practitioners within the field perceive their work or its place or value within their local context, and here I explore the subtleties in definitions discussed in the literature from different contexts.

British academic South's (2004) succinct summary of 'community based arts for health' situates the practice typically: 'in community (including health care) settings'; and stipulates that it:

involves the active participation of individuals or groups (as opposed to being an audience); is aimed at improving health and wellbeing in its widest sense....it is not about treatment or therapy; is underpinned by a social model of health, that recognises the wider social, economic and environmental determinants of health (South, 2004, p. 2).

This definition of community arts and health practice is interesting in its explicit reference to a social rather than biomedical health paradigm. South is making a clear attempt to avoid the blurring of boundaries between the non-professionalised practice which uses a participatory, 'community arts' based approach, and the more visible, familiar, professionalised arts therapy approaches, which are closer cousins of the biomedical treatment model.

Australian Artist and academic Badham in her insightful and relevant article, which discusses an admittedly slightly broader, closely overlapping practice field of which arts and health is a key strand, finds an alarming nine variants, plus additional, more marginal forms:

The practice is known by many names: community art, participatory arts, community-engaged arts, socially engaged arts, arts for social justice, artist and community collaboration, relational or dialogical art, applied aesthetics, and community cultural development. By extension, folk art, ethnic art, outsider art, collaborative art making, circus arts and grassroots arts are also at times included in this 'too hard to define' basket. (Badham, 2010, p. 86)

Badham herself settles on the term 'socially engaged arts practice', linking this to a wider arena of community cultural engagement, and seeking to include 'community and cultural developmental art processes that intend positive social change and facilitate individuals and communities in active participation in their cultural identity' (Badham, 2010, *ibid*).

Berman and Jimenez (2006) document a Mexican historical record of the association of arts, health and community as concepts within the early 1920s Mexican post-revolutionary government, citing health-seeking community-based arts strategies active under pioneering Education Minister José Vasconcelos. Jimenez, Aguirre and Pimentel suggest, however, that in contemporary Mexico community-based participatory arts practice is more commonly described by its Mexican practitioners as 'social' or 'cultural' intervention, or a form of 'arts education', and is generally linked with what is seen as wider developmental and social inclusion rather than specifically health aims and outcomes (Jimenez, Aguirre, & Pimentel, 2009).

Sonke, Rollins et al. note that in America the definition proposed in 2009 by the US Society for the Arts in Healthcare is extremely broad, highlighting the multidisciplinary nature of the field. Making reference to community-based practice as one amongst seven strands of 'arts in healthcare' practice forms active in the US (they list 'community arts for wellness'), their analysis seems however to heavily weight understandings of arts and health in the American context towards a practice found in healthcare settings:

This rapidly growing field integrates the arts, including literary, performing, and visual arts and design, into a wide variety of healthcare settings for therapeutic, educational, and recreational purposes. (Sonke et al., 2009, p. 112)

In their article outlining the field in the UK Clift, Camic et al. (2009) underline the clarification value of definitions that delineate strands of practice, and put forward structural descriptions of the field that communicate its complexity. Each of three definition systems cited – Meyrick’s five-strand model (Angus, 2002), Dose’s four-strand typography (2006), and Smith’s ‘diamond’ model (2001) – includes a community arts strand, as distinct from art therapies, hospitals based interventions, and the medical humanities. The common inclusion of this element in discourses on the UK practice field suggest that community-based arts and health is a more established concept here than in the US. The ‘arts/health diamond’ (fig 2.1) devised by Smith (2001), and promoted by Macnaughton, White and Stacey (2005) is the most explicit in drawing out the distinction between an individual focus and a group focus for the practice, and between a health or an arts emphasis in the work, showing these as key axes in a map characterising arts and health activity. In a move towards a deeper structural appreciation of the field, the arts/health diamond is later developed further by Smith (2003), offering a six point hexagonal map of approaches, correlating with the geography of the diamond. This additional layer differentiates healthy ‘creative expression’; therapeutic arts; art to support and improve healthcare via input with staff or in healthcare environments; arts as communication – ‘as a perspective, messenger and research tool’; community arts; and ‘social arts’ (Smith, 2003, p. 15).

Meyrick’s five-strand ‘Map of the art for health field’ model (Angus, 2002), which attempts to capture a multi-layered perspective is offered as an appendix by Angus to his review of arts for health evaluation. This diagram outlines five key sub-fields – ‘built environment’, ‘art in hospitals’, ‘medical humanities’, ‘art therapists’ and ‘community arts’ – to capture the multidisciplinary arts and

health field in the UK. In the layer beneath, under ‘community arts’ are two further sub-fields – ‘art in community healthcare’ and ‘arts to reach deprived groups’, with further notes on the application of practice in these fields (Angus, 2002).

Key dimensions of arts/health

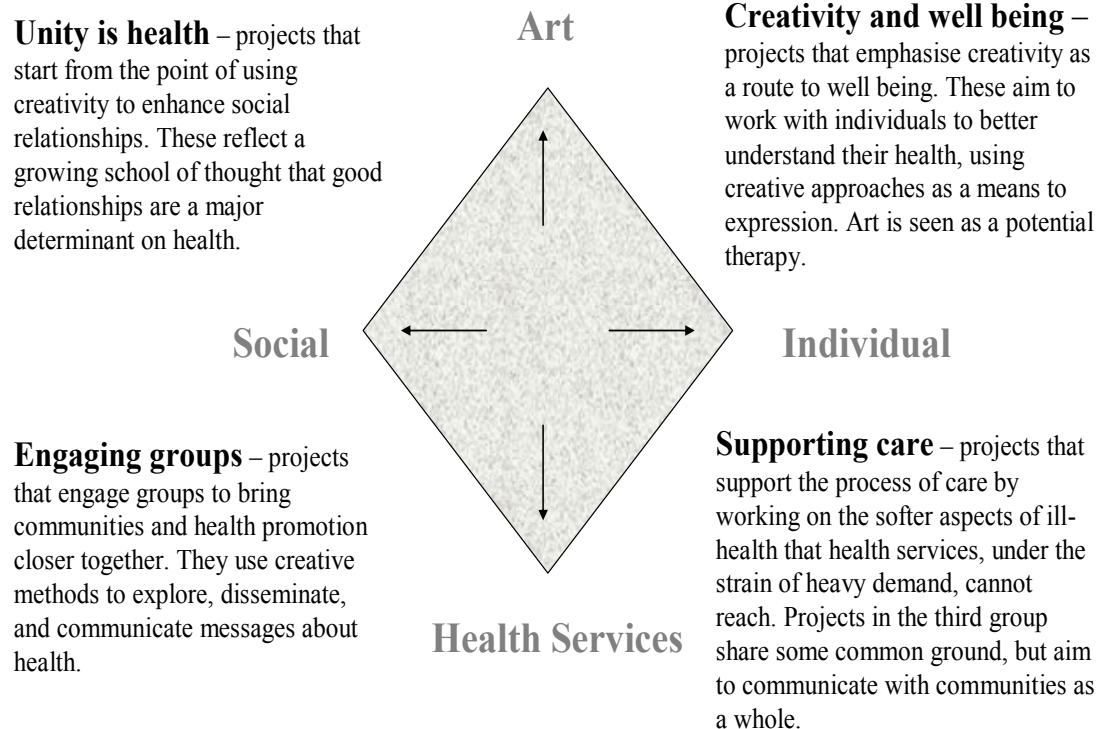


Figure 2.1 The Arts/Health Diamond (Smith, 2003, p. 2) [with permission].

The intended value of presenting models and structural descriptions of the arts and health field is to delineate its boundaries, and to distinguish between elements of related but very different practice which, if left without clarification of their relationship to each other, can be easily confused or conflated. Although the above cited commentators each attempts to pitch for a

useful delineation of the strands of practice that cluster under the umbrella of arts and health, none seems entirely confident of achieving a final, definitive description of the work, and several writers declare this further step as an urgent survival imperative for the practice (Badham, 2010; Dileo & Bradt, 2009; Putland, 2008; Sonke et al., 2009; White, 2009; White & Robson, 2010).

Such calls are not new. Owen Kelly ascribes a fatal weakness, in what was (at the time of his publication) known as the 'community arts movement' in the UK, to a reluctance to reflect on and articulate its own history (O. Kelly, 1984) – a point still echoed as a problem twenty five years later (Badham, 2010). Kelly is critical of its refusal to construct any theoretical framework for its work: 'The movement has staggered drunkenly from one direction to another' (O. Kelly, 1984, p. 2), which resulted, Kelly feels, in its complete lack of self-determination and control. The movement, though made up of many highly principled practitioners, allowed definitions and outside perceptions of the work to be determined not by them, but by funding agencies. His personal reflection on the movement to which he belonged exudes exasperation at the lack of a meaningful dialogue about practice norms or rationales, with people preferring to avoid divergent debate, and for everyone to simply agree that they 'know what they mean' (ibid p. 3). Leaving the crucial detail unarticulated and based on trust and intuition, Kelly feels, stunted the development of the movement at an early stage. Badham (2010) would like to see the field acknowledging that one defining element for the practice is a shared frame of ethics and principles, which are too rarely highlighted or even discussed by practitioners, for fear of alienating funders who may regard them as too radical. She advocates finding a language from amongst the arts and cultural paradigms to articulate and accommodate the 'hybrid' forms of arts practice that emerge at the interface

between social, health or community development and creativity (Badham, 2010).

Phelan explores a similarity between these problems with self-definition and those of ritual practice - as discussed by Bell (1992). Phelan is interested in the challenge of defining a practice so integrally bound up with instinct, and responsiveness to unique contextual conditions, which she sees played out in the practice of community music. To avoid a perpetual swinging back and forth between an over particular and a meaninglessly universal definition she suggests a strategy that avoids descriptive (and ultimately limiting) criteria altogether. This approach would instead frame community arts – with arts and health implicit as part of the community arts sector – as a practice continually extending itself in response to the needs it encounters, and bound together through common contextual factors and actors (where the work is happening and why, as opposed to what and how practitioners are working) (Phelan, 2008). This proposal is dissatisfying in my analysis, since it fails to confront the obscurity and under-investigated character of the practice – challenges my study seeks to address.

Phelan's solution would, for very different reasons, also fail to satisfy Dileo and Bradt (2009), who make an urgent case for clarity in the discussion of the field. Their more pragmatic perspective would like to see the work taken seriously as a singular discipline – or indeed a profession – in its own right, in their US context. They advocate the development of 'a standard language, and a delineation and categorization of its various practices and methods'. Their article juggles arguments between establishing the practice as a 'discipline' – a discipline (Bruscia, 1998, p. 14; cited in Dileo & Bradt, *ibid*, p.169) may be considered an 'organised body of knowledge consisting of theory, practice and

research' – or professionalising it, implying 'the establishment of training/university programs, a professional organisation, and the development of a code of ethics' (Roberts & Dietrich, 1999; cited in Dileo & Bradt, p.169). Their call goes beyond others in its ambition for a professionalization of the practice, and its formalisation. Their definition and categorisation agenda leads on to recommending researching matches between specific arts approaches and specific health conditions, and even types of participant or group (Dileo & Bradt, 2009). With different socio-political pressures in every national context scholars' policy recommendations are hence also diverse, and the conditions within which artists in the field practice, and develop their practice, therefore also subject them to influences, pressures and limitations.

Dileo and Bradt's relatively health-focussed eleven-goal framework for researching the effectiveness and characterising the nature of arts and health work is in tune with Moss and O'Neill's (2009) training-focussed recommendations, from the context of the Republic of Ireland. They promote a knowledge framework for arts and health artists working in healthcare settings, which borrows from the arts therapies, claiming this is necessary because:

at present there are both excellent artists working in health settings and mavericks who can and do cause quite serious problems for patients.
(Moss & O'Neill, 2009, p. 104)

The tensions in the continuing discussion draw out an urgency amongst commentators concerned about the risks associated with unregulated practitioners working in healthcare settings with 'patients', as above, and a resistance amongst commentators who see the experimental elements of the practice as contributing to its strength.

Everitt and Hamilton (2003), in a case study approach to exploring five key projects, note, as the salient finding in their study, a ‘newly emergent professional practice around arts in health in community settings.’ (p.77). Their recommendations stop short of suggesting that moves towards formal professionalization would be desirable, preferring to see the professional standing of community arts and health practitioners as demonstrated in their practice record.

In their recent work, also in the Republic of Ireland, following consultation with artists, health professionals and community development workers, Robson and White propose an ethical framework and best practice guidelines (White, 2010; White & Robson, 2010). White acknowledges that the tensions between the demands of formal professionalization, or registration, of arts and health practitioners, and the need to allow this ‘still pioneering field of work’ to develop and establish further, are challenging for the sector. He concludes that to take the steps towards formally registering practitioners would be premature at this point, as:

this step would exclude far more talent than it includes, would unnecessarily medicalise the activity, and confuse the distinct practices of artists working in healthcare settings and arts therapists. (White, 2010, p. 154)

This inconclusive literature shows where contemporary attempts to define this complex practice rest. All commentators are in tune about one point: if the work is to become more visible and gain outside recognition as a valid set of disciplines, distinct from more conventional care or therapeutically based interventions and approaches to health, delineation and clarification is

incomplete and requires more attention. In attempting to create a grounded characterisation of a core, widely shared community-based practice, as a clear strand within arts and health, my own study seeks to contribute to the development and clarification of the identity of this field of work.

Tracing the history of the practice

Since commentators Kelly (1984) and Badham (2010) have suggested that participatory arts practitioners, such as those active in community arts and health initiatives, have struggled to articulate and reflect on their history, I will now review the discourses in which the heritage of the practice is discussed by scholars in the field, with particular attention to the two settings for my field research (the UK and Mexico).

As I will go on to demonstrate in Chapter 10 (*Transnational and Contextual Perspectives*), much of the literature agrees that an awareness of links between the arts and human wellbeing can be traced back at least centuries (Staricoff, 2004), perhaps to Ancient Greece (Coult, 1983; Matarasso, 2007), or indeed, in the links between art and ritual practices, back to human prehistory (Dissanayake, 1988, 1995). Other commentators find threads within the international – particularly European – cultural history from the early twentieth century which suggest precedents for artists working beyond their individual artistic practice, engaging with populations and communities in catalytic ways, hoping to facilitate change of some kind. They make the link to today's participatory arts and health practice, claiming to identify similar traits in the 'socially engaged' (Badham, 2010) behaviours of all these artist movements (Barnard, 2004; Berson, 2007; Crehan, 2011; Freeland, 2003; Kuppers &

Robertson, 2007; van Erven, 2001). Commentators on the context and history specific to Mexico see a different branch of deep-rooted links to traditional rural village arts, puppetry and indigenous folk rituals (Beezley, English Martin, & French, 1994; Frischmann, 1994).

Some authors, commentating with knowledge as former practitioners, propose that the specific field of practice and ideas, in the UK, in which participatory community arts and health converge is relatively young. Coult and Kershaw (1983), Kelly (1984), McKay (2010) and Crehan (2011) trace the roots of the practice back to origins within the 'community arts' movement, emerging from the counter-cultural tide of the 1960s. Spanish commentator Palacios, reflecting from a European perspective, cites this movement in the UK and its parallel in the US in the 1970s as leading the field in the 'origin and evolution of community and collaborative arts practices' (Palacios Garrido, 2009, p. 197). Kelly (1984) offers a rare, detailed chronology of influences and actors in community arts development in the UK, which recognises a legacy from eclectic sources including Marshall McLuhan, Timothy Leary, the 1950s beat poets, and Joseph Beuys, all of whom expressed politically, socially and culturally critical analyses, at odds with the post-1945 establishment in Western Europe and the United States. Hamilton et al. point to the broad focus of the early UK community arts movement as 'arts plus social concern' (Hamilton, Hinks, & Petticrew, 2003, p. 401); this highlights, along with Brinson et al. of the London-based Community Development Foundation's 1992 *National Enquiry into Arts and the Community*, artists' preoccupation from the beginning with a wider social change agenda: 'Social concern is present in every artist, but to arts in the community it is fundamental' (Brinson et al., 1992, p. x).

A number of commentators on the UK context highlight one organisation, Welfare State International, as key to the development of community arts and health. Prominent in the field in the UK for two decades from 1968, many of the arts methods still current in community-based, participatory arts and health practice – such as lantern parades, bespoke firework celebrations and food festivals – were already evident in its work (Coult, 1983; O. Kelly, 1984; McKay, 2010). It is also cited as a prominent development platform for arts and health *practitioners*; but Kelly notes that this was one organisation and set of ideas amongst several, and that similar initiatives such as ‘Interaction’ and ‘Action Space’ were also important at the time (O. Kelly, 1984). In her anthropological study of London-based arts company ‘Free Form’ from its beginnings in 1970, Kate Crehan traces a parallel story to that of Welfare State International, but from roots in the visual arts. She describes a company working to develop ‘collaborative aesthetic practices’, and ‘ways of creating art that would bring art’s transformative power into the lives of working-class people’: seeking to democratise access to the arts, and strengthen through participation in arts a sense of community and ownership (Crehan, 2011, pp. xvii, 3).

In Mexico although there is less specific discourse on the development history of participatory arts as a practice (health-focussed or otherwise), Azuela cites the founding, in 1938, by leading Mexican muralists O’Gorman, O’Higgins and Morado, of the ‘Taller de la Gráfica Popular’ [people’s graphic arts workshop]. Created to voice opposition to government demands on artists to serve their politically instrumental agendas, it provided top-quality art instruction and production, outside mainstream institutional arts education. Constituting a form of cultural, democratic activism (Azuela, 1993; Azuela, Kattau, & Craven, 1994), and ‘testimony to (Mexican) artists’ conviction that their work should be at

the service of society' (Azuela, 1993, p. 87), this example is perhaps the closest early precursor mentioned in the literature for community-based participatory arts practice in Mexico City. Rosas Mantecón highlights a more recent example of voluntary sector arts initiatives springing up in Mexico in response to social crisis. For example following the catastrophic 1985 earthquakes in Mexico City, which catalysed a moment of grass roots activism, autonomous projects emerged seeking to offer communities experiencing social exclusion, violence and damaged social relationships opportunities to engage in arts activity (Rosas Mantecón, 2011).

Providing what might be seen as a rare (if indirect) link in the development of practice ideas, the work of leading Latin American thinkers, emerging in the 1960s – notably radical educator Paolo Freire and theatre pioneer Augusto Boal – are named by several commentators as influential for community participatory arts practice development, their legacy considered clear in both the Mexican and the UK contexts (Frischmann, 1994; Kuppers & Robertson, 2007; Pearce, Howard, & Bronstein, 2010; van Erven, 2001; White, 2009).

This summary highlights that perspectives on the origins of participatory artists' practice, currently in evidence in the community arts and health field, coalesce into relatively unified views of the heritages, on the one hand of UK-based, and on the other of Mexico-based practice. Drawing one theme from this history, already cited as an issue for Mexican artists as early as 1938, I now distil commentary on the instrumental use of arts practices by governments and other institutions, in the service of health and social agendas, which is confronted as

a contemporary issue of concern by a series of scholars based in the UK, the US, Australia and the Republic of Ireland.

Instrumentalisation of arts practice: A contemporary discourse

Hamilton et al. (2003), Putland (2008) and Broderick (2011) discuss the dichotomy of the arts being harnessed to serve a wider public health agenda, linked to developing social capital and to social inclusion: combating disadvantage, and the health impacts of disadvantage (Hamilton et al., 2003). Echoing earlier protests amongst the Mexican muralists, Broderick, Badham and Putland voice concerns at the sublimation of aesthetic and creative aims, in favour of the instrumental aims in such initiatives; all point to the danger of an accompanying loss of status and visibility of the ‘arts’ element, and the artist, in arts and health initiatives (Badham, 2010; Broderick, 2011; Putland, 2008). Putland (2008) outlines this dilemma with an acknowledgment that greater recognition by government agencies and the wider community of the capacity of the arts to impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, though this may lever resources to support arts and health activity, inevitably comes at the price of instrumentalisation of this kind. In this she points to an even deeper vulnerability for the sector, brought about by the dominance of the conceptual debate by non-arts knowledge systems – exemplified by the common use of social capital theory, (and, I would also argue, medical therapeutic approaches) as frameworks for interpreting arts and health project impacts. The logical endpoint of this trend, she claims, is the ‘eclipsing’ of and ultimate ignorance of arts approaches altogether, whereby:

the subject of art itself – whether as medium, meaning, method or outcome – does not actually arise, which infers a much deeper level of instrumentalism (Putland, 2008, p. 270).

Kelly's critical insider account (1984) predicted such vulnerability within the community arts movement. He attributes the eventual usage of well-meaning practitioners by outside agencies, in the service of political agendas, to the lack of unity of those participatory artists working in communities the 1980s, and their inevitable dependency on state funding. He writes that without having established a theoretical framework for its practice, the community arts movement became understood more under the themes of its impacts and outcomes than by its 'real purposes', its innovative approaches or its own criteria for quality and success. Following this logic, he suggested funders were inevitably then able to shape the direction of the work (ibid pp. 15-25). Analysing the match between the intentions of funders and those of delivery artists, Angus (2002) presents a muddled picture at his time of writing, with many arts and health initiatives failing to articulate clear aims, and few referring to any specific health outcomes anticipated from their projects. He suggests that some artists, by not engaging explicitly with instrumental aims for their work, may be demonstrating resistance to formalised expectations, which they fear will limit or damage their delivery:

There is a tension between the production of good quality art and the production of a particular effect. (Angus, 2002, p. 14)

Clements (2007) lays the blame for a developing instrumentalisation, and the limiting of creative freedom within projects, on the trend in the UK for social impacts evaluation. He is pessimistic about its effect on the sector:

Moreover, advocating the arts through avenues of extrinsic utility may be a self-defeating process as such 'synthetic' instrumentality may eventually narrow down the creative capacity of programmes due to the responsive focusing aspect of the evaluation process, which could result in the arts becoming less experimental, peripheral or stilted. (Clements, 2007, p. 330)

Bishop (2006b) is a more sceptical commentator on socially engaged arts practice altogether. Writing as curator, troubled by the tendency for an ethical evaluation of art projects (including how inclusively artists worked, how democratically ownership was shared and so on) to trump any critique of the artistic quality of the work or its contribution, she suggests the 'social turn' produces a situation in which certain work seems to be considered above criticism, simply due to its ethical integrity.

The discursive criteria of socially engaged art are, at present, drawn from a tacit analogy between anticapitalism and the Christian "good soul". In this scheme, self-sacrifice is triumphant. (Bishop, 2006b, p. 184)

Bishop's view of instrumentalism – that arts practices can become the instrument of a kind of moral autocracy – introduces a further strain on practitioners' *artistic* integrity in such projects. Faced with feeling appropriated as an instrument of public policy, artists may rather decide that by prioritising an ethical integrity in their processes, their own ethical (for example anti-establishment) voice in this work is more authentically expressed, enabling them to feel more autonomous. In this way the intrinsic, creative quality of the art

process or product can be still further subsumed, and its value dimmed, entwined too closely with both political and social/moral agendas.

These discussions present a complex backdrop to assist understanding of elements which might influence arts practitioners' internal dialogues: in guiding the direction of their creative leadership in any project; in the development and character of their practice; and in their perceptions of the place and value of their work. Hostage to the agendas and policy trends of funders, and resisting the dominance of social outcomes over aesthetic or creative outcomes in the evaluation of project aims, these arts practitioners can be seen as inhabiting a friction point, their practice an axis of discourse on the role of culture and the artist in our contemporary world – or as Carey provocatively asks: 'What good are the arts?' (2006).

Perspectives on the strength of extant research

In a climate where funding for public health and social initiatives – particularly those using less conventional approaches – is vulnerable to fluctuations in their perceived value for money; and in which value for money is gauged according to visible recorded outcomes ('evidenced' impacts), scholars frequently discuss the acute sustainability challenges for the arts and health sector, focussing on a need to develop an evidence base of impact. This area of discourse is of interest in assessing the coverage of extant research into the practice, and in weighing up its strengths and weaknesses, to locate where new research could contribute to the canon.

The dearth of research-based, objective reporting has long been seen as an issue impeding balanced investigation of participatory arts interventions,

such as those focussing on health outcomes (Clift et al., 2009; Cox et al., 2010; Sonke et al., 2009; White, 2009). Literature reviews over the past two decades (Angus, 2002; Daykin, 2008; Hacking, Secker, Kent, Shenton, & Spandler, 2006; Matarasso, 1997; Staricoff, 2004; White & Angus, 2003) found that the literature lacked academic rigour – little of it was written for academic audiences or published in the scholarly press. Consequently authors frequently call for higher quality studies investigating impacts from arts and health activity (Argyle & Bolton, 2005; Clift et al., 2009; Daykin, 2008; Dileo & Bradt, 2009; Hamilton et al., 2003; Macnaughton et al., 2005; Sonke et al., 2009; Staricoff, 2004; White, 2009). Thus there has been a recent sharp increase in the amount of scholarly attention and rigour applied to researching the evidence base (Clift et al., 2009; Cox et al., 2010; Sonke et al., 2009; White, 2009; Wreford, 2010), and in academic publishing, galvanised by the emergence of a small number of specialist arts and health related journals.

However, progress in building a credible evidence base has been hampered by disagreement amongst commentators about what constitutes the right kind of evidence (Barton, 2000). Hamilton, Hinks and Petticrew, Dileo and Bradt, and Stuckey and Nobel see no alternative to providing evidence using the kind of measures that are valued by a medical standard, in order to gain attention, regard and resources from the health sector (Dileo & Bradt, 2009; Hamilton et al., 2003; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). A minority of arts and health practices – for example those involving music, of which there are many studies (Clift, Hancox, et al., 2010; Cohen, 2009; Harrison, Cooke, Moyle, Shum, & Murfield, 2010; Lowis, 2010; Staricoff, 2004) – have been investigated using such methods, prepared to bow, as far as possible, to the established hierarchy of evidence (Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes, & Richardson, 1996). But some

academics argue that most arts and health practices – and specifically those used in non-professionalised, community-based participatory practice – do not fit easily into experimental research models (Broderick, 2011; Clift et al., 2009; Lally, 2009; Macnaughton et al., 2005). Angus (2002) and White (2010) argue convincingly that using quantitative measurement models and clinical assessment criteria are inappropriate approaches, since many initiatives aim at what are more subtle, and certainly different kinds of impacts. Instead they suggest the suitability of qualitative, social science approaches for studying the field.

Broderick (2011), Badham (2010) and Clements (2007) – all speaking from a standpoint of arts practitioners and/or educators, as well as academics – favour increasing the prominence of an arts-focussed lens for evaluating the quality and success of projects. Badham (2010) and Broderick (2011) both suggest that the sector itself needs to do more work in reflecting on, understanding and articulating the artistic element in its own practice, in order to appropriately evaluate and gain more status for the work. Several authors (Angus, 2002; Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Broderick, 2011; J. Carey, 2006; P. Carey & Sutton, 2004; Clift et al., 2009; Cohen, 2009; Dileo & Bradt, 2009; McCarthy et al., 2004; Putland, 2008; Raw et al., 2012; Sonke et al., 2009; White, 2001, 2004b) highlight the need for greater attention to theoretical analysis, that takes a multi-disciplinary, theorising approach to research into arts and health. Carey (2006) in his critical evaluation of claims for the social and health benefits of the arts, suggests the need for an interdisciplinary approach to building an understanding of these mechanisms:

Arts research needs to link up with sociology and psychology and public health, and create a body of knowledge about what the arts actually do to

people. Until that happens, we cannot even pretend that we are taking the arts seriously (J. Carey, 2006, pp. 167-168)

Bringing these points together, Cohen (2009) and McCarthy et al. (2004) – with whom, based on my literature review, I concur (Raw et al., 2012) – conclude that, to offer a stronger platform for the accumulating evidence-based impact research, the essential missing step for the field is to focus more academic attention on understanding and theorizing the mechanisms of arts and health practice. To offer a valuable contribution to research in the field therefore, my conclusions suggest new research should acknowledge the value of an interdisciplinary lens, using a qualitative approach and giving attention to theorizing as well as characterising the processes in use.

Source Commentary for the Study

Characterising and theorising the practice

My own research focuses not on examining evidence of impact, but on exploring and theorising the practice and processes used by non-professionalised, participatory artists in community-based developmental and health projects: how do they do what they do? Since, as previously argued, the material investigating impacts from such projects rarely extends, beyond description of artists' approaches, to a deeper explanation (Sixsmith & Kagan, 2005), or a wider or theoretical analysis of processes in use, it is not of direct use in my study. Nevertheless the descriptions of artists' approaches found in this material do offer some interesting insights, and themes can be drawn out which help frame my own exploration. Some texts look for and discuss elements of 'good

practice' (Everitt & Hamilton, 2003; Matarasso, 1997; Smith, 2003; White, 2004a, 2010; White & Angus, 2003; White & Robson, 2010). Others simply observe where certain types of practice appear to match with success in achieving key project outcomes (Brinson et al., 1992; Macnaughton et al., 2005; Rae, 2010). The main themes, found across such accounts and often echoed in the unpublished or 'grey' literature of project evaluations, begin to cluster into some pivotal elements of practice, as follows:

- The distinctive qualities of artists' relationships with participants (Argyle & Bolton, 2005; JW Davidson & Faulkner, 2010; Gould, 2005; Kagan et al., 2005; Kilroy et al., 2007; Matarasso, 1997; Putland, 2008; Rafferty, 2010; Sixsmith & Kagan, 2005; White, 2007).
- Issues relating to creating a sanctuary or suspended, protected space of some kind, where new things are possible (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Boyce-Tillman, 2009; Gould, 2005; Kilroy et al., 2007; Putland, 2008; Sixsmith & Kagan, 2005; White, 2004a).
- The value of modelling and legitimising fun, playfulness, even improvisation (Badham, 2010; JW Davidson & Faulkner, 2010; Dooris, 2005; Landy, 2010; Mwalwanda, 2009; J. Oliver, 2009; Rae, 2010; Sixsmith & Kagan, 2005); and the value of exploring, finding and expressing meanings (Gould, 2005; Putland, 2008).
- The theme of marginality (Kagan & Kilroy, 2007); the common practice of building an ethical framework of strong principles within a project space (Kilroy et al., 2007); and the key role of intuition and spontaneity, and of responsiveness and adaptability (Kilroy et al., 2007; J. Oliver, 2009; Phelan, 2008; Sixsmith & Kagan, 2005).

These themes will go on to be explored and discussed in the main thesis, using this literature as a background to my analysis.

The body of literature authored or collated by artists-turned-academics is also useful, providing interesting characterisations of complex and subtle practices, even if – again – the discussion rarely moves on to find theoretical homes for the work. That said, Kuppers and Robertson collect together some fascinating writings in their *Community Performance Reader* (Kuppers & Robertson, 2007), and, by offering a theoretical backdrop to a diverse range of community performance practices, come closer to theorising community arts and health practice than most other authors. Their stated focus is not specifically arts and health projects but rather the diverse range of artistic disciplines using community performance of some kind. They develop the concept of this as a unified interdisciplinary field through highlighting the value base that unites all their contributors across disciplines. By drawing on radical cultural thinkers and artist-activists Augusto Boal, Paolo Freire, Jan Cohen-Cruz, Dwight Conquergood and Baz Kershaw, like van Erven (2001) when discussing the international community theatre movement, they root their perspective clearly in the international theories of radical politics of resistance and community empowerment, which they believe fuelled the UK community arts movement in the 1960s and 70s. Their book looks at the body of practice and thought in five sections: 'Pedagogical communities', 'Relations', 'Environments', 'Rituals, embodiment, challenge' and 'Practices', each comprising a highly eclectic group of personal reflections on practice, form and intentions. However, like van Erven, what this text does not attempt is to find theoretical paradigms that can accommodate all these ideas, and so place the practices they characterise

within a unified framework, thereby enabling communication of the work's essence to audiences beyond the participatory arts world.

McCarthy et al.'s extensive review (2004) brings together published literature on the instrumental benefits of the arts (literature on the intrinsic benefits of the arts, theoretical material from a range of disciplines to develop a conceptual view of how the arts achieve the benefits that are seen, and literature on participation in the arts), much of which they found suffered from 'conceptual and methodological limitations' (p. xiv). Although not looking at the participatory practice of artists with people in community settings, but rather at the contribution to individuals and to communities of engagement (of some kind) with art (of some kind), the theoretical review section contains useful themes, which will be explored in the main thesis. These are drawn from synthesising concepts relating to learning processes, behavioural and attitudinal change, and community-level social change.

Mike White has published valuable contributions on the characteristics of 'arts in community health projects', drawing attention to structures, settings, conditions and fundamental ethos (White, 2009, pp. 78-86), and using ethnographic observation to compare events, atmospheres and styles of interaction across an international range of case studies (White, 2009, pp. 95-198). White's writing seldom focuses on the specific practice of the artists in such projects, and espouses the view that all the partners involved in community arts and health projects are arts and health practitioners. This perspective is drawn out in White's account 'Developing guidelines for good practice in Participatory Arts Practice in Healthcare Settings':

The term 'practitioner' is not to be understood as exclusively an artist; rather it can be anyone who has a professional role in the preparation,

delivery and evaluation of the work. If the term can be invested in a single occupational role and provided a career path, it might best be understood as a new hybrid profession. (White, 2010, p. 142)

A small amount of academic literature focussing directly on theorising the participatory work of artists does exist. In her historical ethnography of a community arts company, anthropologist Crehan looks for answers to art theory questions of where to situate this practice in relation to the art world, and in relation to society and community. Her analysis highlights elements of the practice: the application of practitioners' high art expertise in a commitment to high quality artistic creation amongst non-artists, and the use of the participatory 'workshop' as a device that confronts traditional authorship in art-making with a collaborative ownership model. This device in itself, she claims, shows benefits to participants. Here she cites Bishop's concept of a 'de-authored lineage that aims to embrace collective creativity', which she sees is 'constructive and ameliorative' as well as demonstrating political commitment, both to the democratisation of art, and to the re-inclusion and visibility of marginalised voices in society (Crehan, 2011, pp. 186-196).

Brown (2006) compares the practices of art therapists and non-professionalised visual artists working on participatory projects in mental health settings in the UK, using Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow', and Dissanayake's 'making special' in his analysis of the value of art making processes. Hills (2006) makes a related study of the relationship between visual arts and psychotherapy – focussing in this case on post-revolutionary Cuba as a research site – and draws on ideas from Bourdieu, Vigotsky and Freire to analyse the drivers for the work in this context. S. Oliver (2009) looks at a community dance initiative for young people through the sociological lens of

Bourdieu's theory on 'habitus', finding themes highlighting the importance, for participants' sense of wellbeing, of negotiating and taking control of their own identity – here achieved through dance.

In his exploration of creativity and the use of improvisation in a healthcare setting J. Oliver (2009) questions interpretations of creativity framed by the narrowing concept of 'innovation' – which he relates to the creation of products – seeing instead that, in his case study, clowns were using the interruption of structure, and opening up moments of improvisation, without events or outcomes governed by the intentions of artists or of policy makers. Through a 'situational' lens he argues, using a concept discussed by Hallam and Ingold (Hallam & Ingold, 2007), that the power of such moments is in 'reading creativity forwards', participants and artists collectively improvising what happens next, which he suggests creates a form of 'communitas'.

In two articles that introduce elements of Turner's theories on spaces of ritual, Atkinson and Robson (2012) argue that using strategies to build liminality may be key to the spatial practice of participatory artists, while Elliott focuses on structure and 'anti-structure', marginality and van Gennep's study of ritual and rites of passage (Elliott, 2011). The latter piece is less directly related to my own research, since Elliott is discussing arts-based inquiry, and drawing on artists' reports of their own non-participatory art-making processes, however the ideas resonate more widely. Atkinson and Robson point to inherent tensions identifiable in participatory arts projects in schools, including subtle power dynamics, and the transferability of benefits in wellbeing to the spaces beyond the project, which arts practitioners must manage in this work. Elliott develops Combs and Krippners' learning concept of 'platforming', to consider the function

of art making and arts based reflection, as facilitating agents of deep change and transformation.

Academic discourse from Latin America exploring understandings of community-based participatory arts, and arts and health practice, rarely focus on practice in Mexico, tending instead to originate in Brazil, Colombia or Argentina (Romero & Giménez, 2007). Colombian scholar Miñana Blasco discusses the ethical frameworks adopted by artists in such work, with a particular focus on '*convivencia*' and the phenomenon of participatory arts practices working to confront violence, or to develop peaceful interaction where tensions have been destructive (Miñana Blasco, 1998). Miñana et al.'s study investigated over 100 projects based in Colombia and neighbouring countries, using in their discussion Goffman's concept of 'symbolic interactionism', Turner's ideas on creative, dramatic tension in ritual, and drawing on Simmel in descriptions of dynamic discord as a cohesive quality in group interactions. Stopping short of providing a theoretical analysis, presenting instead a typology of approaches, they discuss the importance of art form expertise and the artistry in these processes, locate ethics and power dynamics as key themes, and distinguish playfulness and taking the role of mediator as common strategies in the work (Miñana Blasco, Ariza, & Arango, 2006).

Gutiérrez Castañeda, through in-depth case studies of participatory and collaborative artistic processes in Latin America, identifies a deeply considered ethical engagement with disenfranchised communities, especially those who have suffered extreme violence. However he problematizes such issues as power and strategies for empowerment, subjectivity in artistic engagements with

the issue of violence and with victims of violence, and constructs of community in the work (whereby for example communities of a kind can evolve through the arts activity, but may not be positive for their members if their basis is the common experience of violence). Gutiérrez reviews a Colombian context for such work that is very active, and acknowledges its debt to the influential Latin American popular education movements of the 1960s and 1970s. However his sophisticated contribution to the field raises important and difficult questions for the ethical dimensions of an intensive, participatory arts and health practice such as this (Gutiérrez, 2010a, 2010b).

The theoretically orientated literature outlined here looking at practice in the field of participatory arts and health, and the mechanisms used by artists to achieve change through their work, is the extent of what could be found at the point of this study, and shows that this is a very recently emerging line of academic enquiry in the field of arts and health. A theoretical approach such as the interdisciplinary conceptualisation I am undertaking has the potential to help underpin the academic thinking in this field using some useful new references to established ideas.

Chapter 3

Methods and Methodology

Nearly 9:05. I take a tight right-hand turn down one of an intricate warren of narrow streets between the red brick terraces. Peering from my seat I count the houses – there are no numbers, these are back yards – and deciding which house it must be, I pull up outside.

The door opens when I ring and I'm welcomed into the family kitchen, which is buzzing with purpose and excitement. Peter greets me enthusiastically from the stairs, and 'Alice'¹ breezes past with a tray of home made muffins she's brought down from her house – she wants to put them in the oven '...to finish off. I ran out of time. My mum wouldn't be impressed!' she quips. Others have brought juice, coffee, specially selected fruit, and we all seven sit at the old wooden table and share breakfast. This is a congenial sanctuary after the morning traffic. People are friendly, getting a feel for each other, and the humour in the group is good. Even though like me some are at Peter's house for the first time, knowing why we've come creates a kind of affinity, which is rich, and full of anticipation of a really good conversation.

Fed and truly arrived, we retire to Peter's airy attic den, and settle in beanbags, low slouchy chairs or on the rug ('it's my back – I'll probably end up moving round all morning!') for what will be a discussion of several hours. Faint city noise and sunlight trickle in via the velux – now it's over to me.

'Are we all ok if I switch the recorder on now?' 'Yes', 'Totally', 'Go-on, go for it!'

(Field notes, setting for a group discussion, UK, 24/5/10)

¹ See footnote 2 below.

² Practitioner contributors varied in their feelings about anonymity, with some preferring to be named. Particularly because this thesis deals in creativity and ideas I felt respecting this preference where explicitly expressed was important (van der Geest, 2003), to acknowledge

Introduction:

The unfolding of an ethnography in two parts

In this chapter I outline my path towards and through this research story, sketch the choices I had to make, and recount the twists and turns of a developing, emergent research design. I trace the directions of my fieldwork map, and the links and networks in two field sites as they opened up. As the story unfolds I describe the tools I used to stimulate engagement with research questions and to absorb the field, and reflect on the kinds of data my approach generated. The story highlights the organic nature of the spread of contacts, identifying opportunism, flexibility and reflexivity as three key features of the research narrative.

Twenty four years ago, as a young adult, I became involved in community music almost by accident when, as a singer, I was invited to run workshops to help people overcome their fear of singing, and to introduce them to the uplifting and powerful experience of making music together in a group. Alongside performing as a vocalist in a series of ensembles, these kinds of workshops quickly became a mainstay of my working life, but they also grew in significance for me at a deeper level. On the one hand working with groups in this way helped me better understand my own skills, and what motivated me, and the joyous response people showed gave me a continuing sense of sharing something valuable with others. But the process also made me aware that the work I was engaged in with people at such a personal level was part of a bigger picture – both for them in their lives, and also as a developing arts practice within a community context. Seeing my work in the broader development of the

application of arts practices within society, I began to realise that my workshops were part of a wider, community arts movement in the UK.

I have mentioned this beginning because it has certainly informed my research story, through the knowledge I have of the context, through my awareness of the people now working in the field, and essentially through my own involvement in the very practice I am now studying. I still visit on a regular basis to sing with a stroke survivor whom I have known since her stroke twenty years ago, a commitment I have maintained because she says she values singing together as highly as almost any other activity in her week. Other than this (a practice with a slightly different premise since it is one to one rather than group work), I have not worked as a participatory arts practitioner for several years. My role within the arts arena has changed, and for the last ten years I have been working as a project evaluator. However my links with the sector have remained, and because of my historical involvement and my current more independent position, standing outside the work looking in, I am conducting 'insider/outsider' research (Arweck & Stringer, 2002; Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

I view this as 'anthropology at home' (A. Jackson, (Ed.), 1987): although the field sites in my study are widely dispersed, including in the unfamiliar environment of Mexico, I am investigating a practice in which I am thoroughly 'at home'. Having cut my teeth as a practitioner at a formative age, I have a strong, familiar connection to the practice, its climate, currents and tides, which have drawn me back home to study its intricacies; but with an older gaze. Today, ten years on, with my changed role within the field, the distance of time and other experiences has opened up a necessary 'discontinuity between [my] accounts of them' (meeting these practitioners and their practice in my current role as

researcher) 'and their accounts of themselves' (Rapport & Overing, 2007, pp. 19-30).

The discontinuity created by my change of role has enabled me to find an ethnographer's engagement with the subject; however the reality remains that, for myself in relation to my study, I need to see 'the ethnographic present as part of the autobiographical past' (Hastrup, 1987, p. 100). In this study reflexivity has been a constant thread (Nesbitt, 2002), whereby I am always aware that my prior experience creates an entanglement: there exists a deep footprint into which I now tread afresh and, likewise, what I now discover creates a new imprint, altering the footprint of my prior experience. Both experiences affect each other, they cannot be disentangled, and my analysis through this thesis is inevitably an interplay between the two.

Though aware that my proximity to my research subject might create a suspicion of a partisan perspective (something I have interrogated in myself throughout the research process, using my reflective journal), I also realise that this proximity has enabled my inquiry process to be nuanced, seeking an understanding of subtlety. In a group discussion one practitioner clarified that my insider/outsider position offered a depth of trust that was valuable to the process:

You are an artistic person, you're not just outside, you are also a practicing artist who understands – you ask the right questions really. You can't ask the right questions unless you're inside the subject... your pushing and prodding is absolutely right.

(Peter², Group Discussion 2, UK, 24/5/10)

Respondents in this group expressed that, based on this trust, they felt this was a good opportunity to contribute to a body of academic research. Others on several occasions said that they seldom had the opportunity to spend time reflecting on and discussing their practice, and even less so with a group of respected peers, and that they valued the opportunity for this reason. In such comments I became aware of the reflexive contribution of the study itself in the sense described by Nesbitt:

I take reflexivity to mean the recognition that both researcher and researched inhabit a shared cultural space and that neither can be quite the same after the fieldwork encounter. (Nesbitt, 2002, p. 133)

I came to this research with a growing fascination for the role of participatory arts practitioners in relation to their participant groups, and in relation to the settings in which they often work. Conducting project evaluations, usually asked to watch and advise projects as an outside eye and 'critical friend', I became intrigued by aspects of practitioners' approaches of which, if questioned, the practitioners themselves didn't seem consciously aware. None of my evaluation briefs offered the scope to explore these questions further, and some of this curiosity certainly underpins the rationale for this study.

² Practitioner contributors varied in their feelings about anonymity, with some preferring to be named. Particularly because this thesis deals in creativity and ideas I felt respecting this preference where explicitly expressed was important (van der Geest, 2003), to acknowledge original contributions to this collective creative process. Hence names appear in inverted commas where contributors either preferred a pseudonym (as with 'Alice' in the field notes, p.58 above) or could not be reached to express a preference and appear without inverted commas where, following their preference, their real name is used (as Peter, here). All project participants are anonymized throughout, and to simplify the reading of the text their pseudonyms appear without inverted commas.

Throughout my years of involvement with participatory arts I have been party to endless debates and discussions about how and whether arts organisations were able to justify applying for public money to run projects in community settings, and because of this and subsequent experience in outlining 'the case for the arts', I have to declare many years as an advocate for the value of participatory arts practice (when well executed) in community settings. However when my role within the arts arena changed, I was required to use a more critical viewpoint to assess the effectiveness of arts interventions. I then developed a more broadly informed awareness of arts projects that are less successful, and why, and of quality thresholds in the work. All of this has to some extent moderated my earlier, simply enthusiastic arts advocacy viewpoint, and I have grown accustomed to a critical insider/outsider position in relation to the field of participatory community arts.

Who to include, and how to reach them

Afro pulled back from his face with a broad hair band, 'Ricci's' steady eye contact and quizzical grin suggest someone who takes nothing for granted. A local city kid, he talks about the role his dual heritage played in his troubled younger life – from which he feels music finally rescued him. He is now a music graduate, and has been a rapper: 'Hey, I was nearly signed, me, back in the day!' he once brags with self-mockery to a group of young people in his workshop. His manner with challenging youngsters is calm and full of humour; but cross him and he flashes non-negotiable authority. In discussion 'Ricci' talks fluidly, throwing in the unexpected with a grin – 'I love to perform!' he confesses when I probe further.

(Sketch drawn from field notes, UK)

My premise for this research was that, as clarified through my literature review, the research canon in the field of arts and health has left the artists' processes and mechanisms for achieving any outcomes inadequately explored, much less theorised (Raw et al., 2012). My research seeks to address this lacuna by focussing on these processes and mechanisms, rather than replicating the tendency to research the outcomes of practice. For this reason ethnography – becoming subsumed in the complex web of interacting elements in everyday workshop or project life – was my *modus operandi*. Observing and absorbing, to the point of developing a heightened awareness of minutiae, and seeing and feeling the resonances of practitioners' mores in their work environment, was an appropriate methodology (White, 2009), which I felt, together with spending time in deeply reflective discussions with practitioners, might find another level of understanding of the practice, of value to the field.

My range of research respondents was a purposive selection of expert individual practitioners, who share certain commonalities that cohere them as a notional 'community' for focussed study: they are all trained artists, engaged to work creatively with groups in community settings, in participatory arts projects seeking to catalyse change, health and flourishing; and they all have a highly regarded reputation in this work. To this extent they can be seen as loosely typical of a much wider group of peers; while it may be more complicated to view them as representative of their field, since the field they might be considered to represent is not yet defined.

I needed to ensure that all my research contributors were practitioners whose practice was worth exploring: the quality of their work offering me useful insight into effective practice. I thus used the approach affirmed by Bernard as an acceptable anthropological methodology, purposively seeking out experts as

key contributors (Bernard, 1988, p. 171). To this end I initially invited the involvement of participatory artists whom, from my role as a project evaluator, I knew to be highly regarded and experienced. To support my choices I ensured that their participatory work in community settings had been consistently evaluated – not only by me – as being of a high standard both creatively and in terms of outcomes for participants; and secondly that those I invited were currently working, and constantly in demand as specialists in the field. This strategy provided quality assurance for my initial study sites and contributors, and for this my long experience in evaluation in the field, having observed and reported on at least 100 projects looking at effectiveness, offered a strong platform.

From these first contacts I extended the scope of my study beyond my own networks by taking ‘snowball’ recommendations from these practitioners for any of their peers whom they respected creatively, and regarded as highly skilled and effective – these were other practitioners whom they felt represented the best of those working in the field. Peer respect is not given lightly within participatory arts circles for two reasons: competition for work is very strong, and practitioners are extremely aware of each others’ reputations, and who amongst their peers they know could do at least as good a job as they feel they could themselves. Equally, practitioners are acutely aware that a colleague making a poor job of a contract is likely to affect the reputation of the whole sector, and work opportunities are likely to suffer as a result. For the same reason, to recommend a peer to participate in research seeking to represent the sector, practitioners needed to feel able to guarantee the quality of their colleagues’ practice.

I felt it was important to include as much variety in contacts and field sites as possible. I was concerned that I risked weakening my findings if I failed to establish whether a style of participatory arts practice, which I might go on to identify as characteristic of the sector, was in fact specific only to a type or a subgroup of artists (based for example on their art form, their gender, ethnicity, age or other characteristics). Mindful of this risk, I resolved to monitor the data throughout the study for signs of emerging themes in practice characteristics coinciding with other common factors amongst the same contributors. I would explore any such co-incidence further by purposively adding new contacts and sites, to test the theme. I made efforts to include practitioners from a range of art form areas, to include men and women, some younger or with less experience, and some older or with long experience, and from a range of cultural, educational and heritage backgrounds, but without specifically seeking to ensure balance across these differences. The criteria that all my research contributors shared were, as previously stated: active involvement in delivering high quality, participatory arts workshops, with groups in community settings.

Research contributors: UK

'Eve' welcomes me into the brightly sunlit room where her group for dementia sufferers has exhibited their work – beautiful fragments of memories, set like jewels against the white walls: single words, framed; a string of photographs pegged out like a miniature family washing line; exquisite embroidery pieces. One woman has created a basket full of tiny, red paper hearts, for each visitor to take one away with them. 'Please take one: To remember love in your life' is the instruction on a card beside the basket.

[I find one of these weeks later in my pocket, and cannot account for the tremendous warmth it transmits].

We sit at the table. 'Eve' is still, and intensely pensive, with thick, below shoulder length grey hair and fiery blue eyes. This is the second time we have met. She engages openly and reflectively, taking time before responding to each of my questions or contributions. She recounts the layers of life experience behind her arrival here, to make art with people in a difficult and vulnerable stage of their lives. Her presence is both tranquil and challenging – I sense that she enjoys the spark of grappling with intransigence.

(Sketch drawn from field notes, UK)

When I began this study my research centre at Durham University was already working with a cluster of community arts and health projects, and my supervisors were keen for me to include some of this work in my study. One of the artists, Mary, was very well known to me, as I had previously evaluated a significant project in which she was the lead artist, and I chose to invite this experienced practitioner to be one of a small number of key informants, with whom I would have on-going contact throughout the research project. A second of these artists, Ali, was not known to me personally, but I was aware of her exemplary track record, and Mary knew her well. She also agreed to be one of my key informants. These two highly experienced practitioners, linked through shared history as artists working for many years in a similar pool, were my first two contributors. The contacts map (fig 3.1) below shows how, through inviting these and then other practitioners whose work I knew, these closest contacts created snowball contacts to other practitioners.

Gradually the range of networks accessed, and the spread of individuals becoming involved, grew wider than my known contacts. I was developing opportunities for in-depth dialogues with practitioners both known and unknown

to me, as well as spending time on site in a range of projects, immersed as participant-observer.

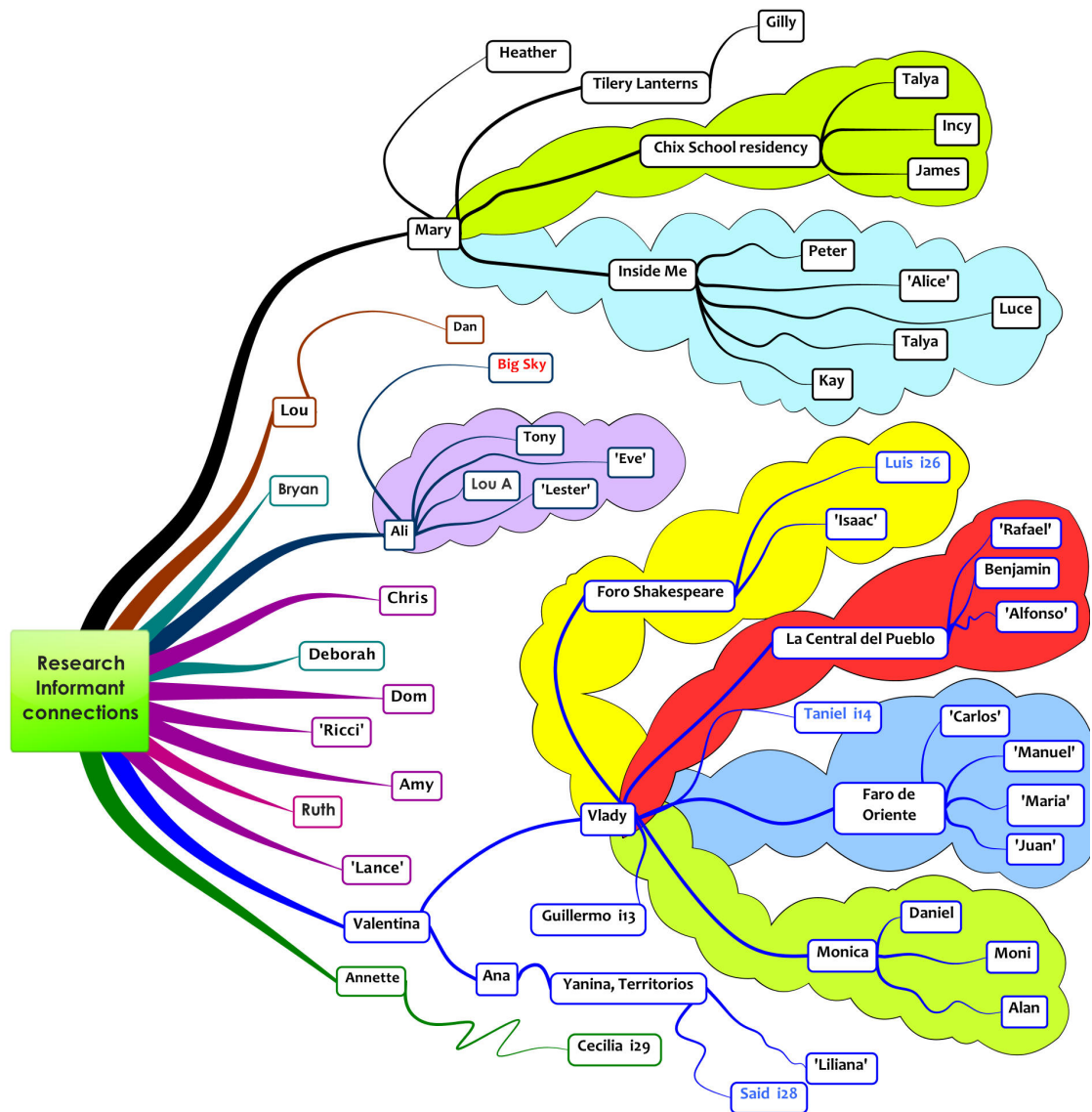


Figure 3.1: Map of research informant connections

I was surprised how willing those I approached were to participate in my research and to offer such opportunities. My knowledge of experienced participatory artists tells me that they are often heavily over-committed, despite a relatively low income (compared for example to most of the caring or teaching professions). Unable to pay them for the time they spent with me, I was conscious that my invitation might seem insensitive, or they would not manage to prioritise the time to take part. However this was not the case. As an introduction to the study I explained the ideas behind the project and the research focus, using an information sheet, and a sign-up form for individuals to volunteer their involvement. I offered different possibilities for involvement, emphasising that a change of heart at any point was entirely possible; and most people have been very keen to take part.

Balancing depth and breadth

I had originally planned to include up to fifty individual practitioner respondents, in three groupings with different levels of involvement: firstly a small core group of up to ten respondents as 'key informants', offering an in-depth exploration of their methods and thinking, and incorporating observation opportunities. I would supplement this with a larger group of up to twenty respondents, contributing via group discussions. Finally, in this model I had planned to engage a third group, possibly including twenty or more practitioners, to contribute as a wider reference group.

As the research unfolded the size and functions of different groups (or tiers) of contributors shifted slightly. The core group of key informants (tier 1) became settled at three (Mary and Ali in the UK, and eventually Vlady in Mexico),

who offered me the chance for on-going discussion throughout my study, as well as introducing me to other leads and projects, and inviting me to observe project activity. Having a smaller number of 'expert' informants than anticipated was a decision born largely of the scope of my project and my realistic capacity to analyse enormous volumes of data. Since the level of contact with the three key informants was high, to involve more than three individuals to this extent would have limited the feasible breadth of my study. I had to choose between working with a small number of more in-depth studies, relying heavily on these three 'expert' informants' experiences and perspectives to build a picture of the practice, supplemented by light touch contact with a further group in order to check the typicality of what was emerging from my core group; or else casting a wider net to more contributors, to capture more variety of experience, and using the three key informants as reference points and sounding boards for my on-going thinking.

While Bernard suggests that finding, observing and working with cultural experts is an acceptable approach (Bernard, 1988, p. 171), I felt limited by working through the narrow focus of a small number of key informants. As my project unfolded I chose instead to prioritise the middle tier of my contributors as the main source of my data – engaging with a wider number of practitioners in some depth, visiting more projects for participant-observation and holding dialogues with this group. The notional third tier – the wider, informal reference group of practitioners – eventually consisted of those artists who had been interested in taking an active part, but in the end were unable to. This more amorphous group has offered responses to my findings towards the end of my analysis, and I plan to remain in contact with them, to solicit their perspectives on my on-going research in this area. However with such a fleeting involvement

they are not specifically counted within the scope of my respondent group. A table of active participants showing their forms of involvement is included as an appendix to the thesis.

Despite seeking greater breadth as outlined, eight months in to my project I was nevertheless concerned that too many of my informants were linked, either directly or through shared networks, to my initial key informants, Mary and Ali. I was also concerned that I had not yet managed to involve a sufficiently large number of artists whom I hadn't been aware of prior to this research. I was troubled: I felt there was a danger that any convergence I might discover in their perspectives could simply be due to their contact with each other through being active in similar networks. Using snowball contacts, I was realising, inevitably carries this drawback, that the range of respondents are all members of a narrowly related or closed circle. Such a strategy is appropriate when purposely seeking access to members of a closed community, but not so useful when seeking to identify or distinguish a group, using the similarity of individuals' characteristics as a criterion. I realised that a challenge I had identified, that of working without a clearly defined field from which to draw, was in danger of ensnaring me in a vicious circle. Not yet quite clear how to solve this dilemma, I knew that in any case I urgently needed more diversity amongst my contributors.

Opportunism in action

At a conference in Bristol I formed an opportunistic contact with Mexican cultural producer Valentina De Rojas, who gave a paper about arts project work

in Mexico City. Her presentation, which included documentary video footage, discussed the work of participatory artists in a large project, 'El Faro de Oriente', located within a disadvantaged and troubled district of the city. The video element of the presentation immediately caught my attention – here were participatory artists who, despite speaking a different language, and living on a different continent, seemed very familiar to me in the way they described their activity, and here also were project participants speaking of creative experiences, of change, and of growth, that I recognised as similar to the responses of participants in projects I knew in the UK. Valentina suggested that getting in touch with the artists and the project would be easy. At this stage I didn't speak Spanish at all, but I felt unable to ignore such a potential opportunity: to expand my study to include artists who would bring such a degree of distance from my current tight circle of contributors, as well as offering greater diversity within the respondent group. After the conference Valentina put me in email contact with a video maker, Vlady, whom I interviewed via Skype in English, and subsequently got to know very well. He warned me, however that none of the artists in Mexico City were likely to speak English. I needed to learn to speak Spanish quickly.

I was expecting to conduct Skype dialogues with Mexican artists from the UK via my computer; but within three months of my first Skype contact, thanks to a travel grant administered by the University I was booked to travel to Mexico in person. The distant notion of developing a Mexican field site was increasingly becoming a reality. With previous experience in the field of practice in the UK, but no previous experience of any kind in Mexico, I hoped that if I travelled to Mexico, from that distance the 'heightened intensity' of even a short, immersive experience (Watson, 1999, p. 2) away from home had the potential to

offer new perspectives on the character of the UK practice. Being exposed to differences in practice norms specific to each cultural context, I thought I might become aware of common characteristics through their presence in one setting and absence in the other. The remove itself, I hoped generally, might facilitate a more dynamically reflexive consideration of my UK-based auto-anthropology (Rapport & Overing, 2007, pp. 19-30). If I decided in the end to include data from the Mexican fieldwork in my study, I felt the pairing of these two sites would present a significant geographic, socio-economic and political distance. I saw particular value in the opportunity to make a comparison of the workings of the practice across what I presumed would be such a wide cultural gulf, one study site in the economically advantaged Global North (UK) and one in a middle-income country in the Global South (Mexico). This was an opportunity not to be missed.

I made arrangements to spend four weeks on fieldwork in Mexico City, thirteen months after first meeting Valentina in Bristol. Although my Spanish was still pretty shaky I resolved that I would conduct Mexican dialogues in Spanish, and record them to get help with translation later. I rehearsed interviewing Latin American Spanish speakers before I left the UK, concerned that I needed to be able to pick up subtle language references and unexpectedly different perspectives without drawing too much attention to my own responses to their comments. As I flew out to Mexico I was still anxious about the methodological weakness created by the language barrier. In the end my first dialogues took place within a week of arriving – a stiff test of my research methods – but they went well. All but one of my fifteen Mexican research dialogues were conducted completely in Spanish, which ensured as far as possible that Mexican respondents had as much linguistic freedom to express themselves as my UK

respondents; and I was fascinated to discover that the language used by the Mexican contributors presented me with very little problem: I could understand the points they were exploring and the directions of their thinking. I knew that as a native speaker I would inevitably have greater insight, at the analysis stage, into the subtleties of contributions in English, creating an imbalance I would need to be aware of in the analysis process. My Mexican audio recordings demanded more analysis time than the English data for this reason, but the dialogue process itself was smooth and relaxed. This unexpected ease suggested that, despite the language gap, a degree of familiarity and trust was easy to develop between myself and the Mexican artists. It also demonstrated that the conceptual territory of the research was familiar – a shared territory – and that even in Mexico I was ‘at home’ with the practice that was my research subject. This familiarity despite differences was fascinating, and was an early indicator of later findings about transnational convergences in the character of the practice.

Recruiting and accommodating contributors: Mexico City

‘You can’t miss him,’ she says, ‘he’s the redhead!’

We walk across the dusty ground to a shed-like building adjacent to the main ‘Faro’ building, and pop our heads in through the open door. The ceiling is high, and there are work benches with vices, wood carving tools hung on the walls, paraphernalia of making processes all around, and people moving about fetching materials, or with heads down and hands on their developing constructions. ‘Juan’ is marked out more by his fair skin and freckles than his red hair, which is simply not black, like everyone else’s here. He is slim, perhaps 50, with a deeply grooved face, and furrowed brow. He flashes intense glances and his smile is nervous. He speaks very quickly to agree to talk with me about his work, offering to meet

after his workshop. His Spanish is clipped and harsh, strongly rolled 'r's and staccato delivery.

It takes some time for us to settle down for a dialogue, 'Juan' deferring and avoiding the moment several times. At one point I think we are going to eat together, he directs us to a house in the local estate, which the family have opened up as a small cantina. But he was not intending to eat with us; he eats with two women from his workshop on a separate table. At this point I begin to think he has changed his mind about a dialogue, but when he is ready he gives me his full attention.

We are outside, sitting on a low stone bench, feet in the dust, and surrounded by odd artefacts and scraps of colourful, discarded materials. Behind us the wall is animated by vibrant graffiti, glowing in the incandescent sun. He begins with a brusque statement that he is a man of the left, pragmatic, deeply disturbed by poverty. I welcome this spontaneous beginning, and then explain why I am interested, why I am here, and apologise for any problems with my spoken Spanish. I am still not sure he wants to talk – his eyes are prickling with guardedness. But I begin: 'If you were going to describe what it is you do to somebody who didn't know anything about your work, what would you say?'

He looks surprised. I think he was expecting something more formal. He then begins to share the story of his own deep affective reorientation through his experience at this project, where he has been working for over 10 years. As he gradually becomes more engaged with the dialogue all the original nervousness and defensiveness fades. 'I was arrogant' he says. 'I thought I knew things, but then I realised that I don't know anything.' He has grown animated, very involved, and smiles tumble out of him, sentence for sentence.

'I'm tough!' he says of himself at one point, with a challenging smile. I sense this as an apology rather than a claim. As our dialogue unfolds he seems toughest on himself. The pack of large, mangy street dogs which collect in the project yards want to be near him, and he controls them by name without effort, at one point stopping our dialogue to discipline a scrap and some howling....

('Juan', dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

My field visits in Mexico City were diverse, including observing work with learning-disabled artists, and work in a maximum-security prison. The video maker I had first spoken with via Skype, Vlady, became my main link with people and activity while I was in Mexico - my guide. He accompanied me to as many

of the observations and dialogues as possible, in case he was needed for on the spot language assistance, though this almost never occurred. He became simply an unobtrusive observer of the process, through whom I could gain useful feedback on my engagement style with contributors. He also helped me in advance to adjust my Spanish language questions to the appropriate linguistic register, matching my English language phrasing. He put me in direct contact with three community based participatory arts projects (El Faro de Oriente, La Central del Pueblo, El Foro Shakespeare) where I made contact with practitioners whom he didn't directly know. One contributor he did supply was in fact his father, with whom I proactively sought contact after hearing about the field of his work, because I felt as an older arts practitioner he might offer my study some greater historical context to the work in Mexico City.

Meanwhile I had also been pursuing academic links in Mexico City, important to help me understand more about the local cultural context. Six months before visiting Mexico, Valentina put in me in touch with Ana Rosas, anthropologist at UAM – Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana. Ana became a good friend, and put me in touch with a further set of contacts in Mexico City. My accommodation while in Mexico City was with Annette, a retired GP, who was another excellent contact for developing an understanding of Mexican culture. Resident in Mexico City for 65 years, but a white woman with German heritage, she was a cultural insider/outsider, and she had an anthropologist's curiosity and gaze. We spent hours discussing culture, society and politics, and she also facilitated a link for me with another artist, Cecilia, via a theatre director friend. This contact resulted in a dynamic email and Skype correspondence in lieu of face-to-face contact, because Cecilia lived outside Mexico City, and I did not manage to meet her before I left. As my time in

Mexico City was limited to a calendar month there was a clear end to the snowballing development of my informant group there. However it was also obvious that, even without the overlapping work or interconnections that I was so wary of in my UK study sites, the Mexican informants were generating data which was throwing up clear repeating themes in response to the same questions, and I felt confident I had reached data saturation in this site.

Saturation point

I was gaining access to new contacts in the UK all the time, as my connection with the field deepened, and as people heard about my research and offered ideas for new respondents, or volunteered to take part themselves. I was beginning to see saturation in my data from UK contributors, but was still keen to keep an eye on increasing the diversity in my study. For this reason I purposively recruited four more research participants, whose diverse backgrounds and different networks I felt were valuable to the study. These final contributors did not however generate different material; their contributions and my observations of their work were consolidating and matching existing themes. Finally I was satisfied that I had reached saturation with UK contributors, and officially stopped establishing new contacts.

Beyond this group of 41 directly contributing arts practitioners I also included contributions from a range of project participants. While my focus was very much on arts practitioners themselves rather than project participants, there were occasions when my participation in project activities gave me the opportunity to talk to participants about their perspectives on the practices they were involved in, and on practitioners' interactions with them. A group of project participants took part in an organised group discussion, and others contributed

through informal commentary during my participant observation in project workshops. Through all these channels my entire number of research participants from both the UK and Mexico amounted to 60, of whom 41 were active arts practitioners (15 in Mexico and 26 in the UK). The practitioners' age range spanned over forty years, from early twenties to mid sixties; 21 were male and 20 female; they were from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, and diverse in their respective cultural heritage identities. In terms of arts expertise there were specialists from more than twenty different artform areas, several practicing in more than one art form. Contributors included visual artists, drama, story and performance specialists, musicians, dancers, writers, media and graphic artists, filmmakers, sculptors and carnival artists. At last I felt satisfied that my research respondents included sufficient diversity to support sound analysis.

Strategy shift post-Mexico City

On my return from Mexico there was a new challenge in my study design. I now had substantial amounts – albeit in two different languages in which I was by no means equally fluent – of rich research data from the UK, (largely based in the North East of England, with two contributors in the South West of England) and from Mexico City (see Appendix 1 for a summary of research contributor characteristics and nature of involvement in the study). I needed to consider whether adding in the Mexican field site would in the end enrich or upset my study. My sense was that if I reframed my research design slightly I could incorporate the Mexican data on an almost equal footing with the UK data (taking into account the inevitably different levels of nuanced understanding I

was able to apply to both data sets). If I should then discover characteristics in common in artists' practice and approach that straddled the distance between the two settings, this would vastly enrich my findings. I could also let go of two key methodological concerns. Firstly, cross-fertilisation between networked practitioners could not now be distorting findings of similarity in approach or practice, because there were no links between the Mexican and UK practitioners. Secondly I could allay my concern that, through purposive selection of contacts, if I sought out practitioners based on their shared characteristics to form a cohesive study group this arguably rendered any findings of similarity and recurrent themes meaningless. Including the Mexican contributors meant that any degree of shared characteristics within the approach or practice found across the breadth of my sample could no longer be attributed to my use of a purposive or snowball sampling strategies, because I hadn't used these strategies to build the respondent group in Mexico. Networks had unfolded much more organically, via several unconnected routes.

With already a good knowledge of my data I was aware that there were clear similarities in responses across the whole pool of contributors. A comparison of the practice, styles and approach of a broad range of participatory artists, some working in communities in Mexico City and some in communities in the North East and South West of England, which yielded real convergence of contributions could reveal themes in the practice which transcended national, linguistic and cultural differences. This was a potential finding I had not been expecting, and I felt it merited investigation, as well as exploration and consideration of what it might mean for theorising the practice. Despite the additional work it would entail, I chose to incorporate the Mexican

fieldwork as part of my study, and began analysing the data as one cohesive set of data.

In this narrative I have outlined the iterative development of my research methodology, showing a shift from an ethnographic study in one site in the UK to a multi-sited ethnography, incorporating and comparing contributions and experiences spread across two internationally distinct contexts, and differing sites and settings within those national contexts. The narrative details the process of purposively identifying research contributors and projects in order to strengthen the study, and outlines my related developing concerns about balance, narrowness of study sample and bias. It explains how seeking to address these concerns led me to take an opportunistic leap abroad to increase the diversity of my field sites and experiences, and the further methodological developments that grew from this decision. An ethnographic study, at different points exploratory, descriptive and comparative, the final methodology followed an inductive, interpretive arc, in which a new frame of enquiry – incorporating an investigation of the degree to which the practice is context-bound – began to emerge during the generation and analysis of data.

Tools for the Job

My fieldwork approach generated qualitative data using a range of methods which reflect the emphasis I placed on artists' and participants' behaviours and interactions, and artists' intentions and reflective understandings (Mason, 1996);

in effect this was an 'informant- or person-centred' approach (Wolcott, 1999, p. 156). Though not a *grounded* study in a pure sense as outlined by Corbin and Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), since I had prior experience and therefore some existing views of the practice I was investigating, I have grounded my theory development in the data: I used open coding and inductive analysis, responding to emerging themes within the data that my on-going field research was generating. I used the principles of grounded theory to guide the on-going development of the project, taking my lead in developing the research path from the cumulative data the process was generating.

One to one 'dialogues'

'Manuel' is short, with thick, greying hair, beard and round glasses. He wears an apron, and brushing dust off his hands comes straight from his workshop to sit with me outside. He is calm and very reflective. He speaks slowly, and his comments often refer to ideas, ways of understanding or thinking. Although very quietly spoken Manuel does not seem nervous, he conveys a confidence and a gentleness combined. When I suggest that I may have taken already too much of his time, he brushes off this suggestion. 'No – It's very enjoyable talking. It's interesting how in this kind of chat, you start to understand a lot of things, because we're disentangling a lot of these questions which we carry around with us anyway, it's interesting. If you like we can talk more!'

(Manuel', dialogue, Mexico, 26/11/11)



Figure 3.2: A one to one dialogue in Mexico

I conducted one to one dialogues with over half of my research participants: these were semi-structured, using a schedule outlining a series of open questions, but allowing the discussion to roam freely in-between, using probing to guide deeper explorations. One to one dialogues lasted between 30 and 120 minutes, and on average 70 minutes. Initially I thought of these contacts as interviews, but listening to the audio recordings I became aware that I had sometimes been actively involved in the conversation, so that a different kind of interaction – more of an interchange – resulted. I could hear that I was drawing on my own experience and knowledge of the practice we were discussing as a resource, to probe more deeply during the interactions, (in the style of Holstein and Gubrium's 'active interview' (1995, pp. 45-46)), aware that the response initially given contained many more layers of potential insights. In effect I was challenging the practitioner to keep reflecting with increasing depth on something they were hinting at, as suggested in the vignette of my dialogue with

'Manuel' above. This form of interaction had partly developed because the practitioners so often referred to 'intuition' in their descriptions of practice, and intuition was a term they were using to cover many processes that they found it difficult to see clearly or to analyse (see Chapter 4). I therefore took a more proactive role in teasing out the deeper layers of practitioners' workshop delivery experiences, to get beyond the closed door of 'intuition'. These interactions are now referred to as 'dialogues', to indicate the involvement of both parties in the discussion, and should be understood as bilateral, reflective, searching explorations.

The stimuli for dialogues grew from my research questions, which were adapted for the three different contributor groups: artists, project directors and project participants. Considering the data as it accumulated allowed me to bring into the next contact session any ideas and theories that were drawn from data generated with other respondents. This offered the chance for practitioners to contribute directly to my interpretation process (Mays & Pope, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The semi-structured approach was useful for data analysis later; it offered focus areas within the data relevant to each of my questions and sub-questions. But allowing flexibility for unstructured sections in the dialogues also offered the opportunity to spot new themes in respondents' contributions, and enabled me to pick up on these as they arose. This was initially difficult in the Spanish language dialogues, but became easier after the first two or three dialogues, as I grew more confident to understand, allow and follow deviation from my questions.

The group discussion

Praise is really easy and powerful, and if you can just be a bit alive to the right moment... what I feel I'm doing in workshops is 'waiting for the moment' [D]

– um – It's a bit hedonistic, but I can give people something so easily that makes them feel that they 'can'. It's really really easy for me to do. People who've had something taken away from them, that has stayed with them forever – that they 'can't'. People who are 80 remember 70 years ago being told 'you can't draw'... But I can give it back to them.....It happens very quickly and very easily – it's just pure pleasure really. [L]

[Researcher] Saying it feels hedonistic, that's a very powerful word, and it's like you're saying it feels indulgent almost, to enjoy it that much.

Yes – it's just the pure pleasure back that I get – [L]

[Researcher] But it's not your own – it is interesting, because it's not your own, you have a kind of pleasure in other people's creative expression..?

Not creative expression, it's just the fact that they can! They can do it. People can. – it's more about empowering people, to exi(st), to be unique, that they are ok to be unique, and that they can do something that gets rid of all those preconceptions... it is that affirmation...[L]

[Researcher] Maybe, how you see the people you're working with is linked to what you want to do with them or for them, or what you want to create together, which is linked to what you think are powerful tools. So – praise is a powerful tool, affirmation is a powerful tool, and it's easy for you to give

I don't think it's easy to give, because I think it's dangerous as well. [L]

But it doesn't cost you, if the moment's right it's not costing you anything! [D]

But it's got to have integrity. [L]

*I've got to be responsible – it's not just an empty thing, it's got to have meaning.
And also I don't think it will be effective unless it has meaning. [D]*

*[Researcher] I think what you're saying there is it's not exactly
praise for an artistic achievement, I think what I'm hearing is that
it's praise for somebody being brave enough to take a new step.
That's what (seems to) ties these things together. Seeing them
take a new step, that seems to be something that warrants
praise, or that gives you a sense of 'wow'.*

*It's a kind of respect in a way. It's a bit like admiration, the praise
happens without – praise might not be the right word...[L]*

Recognition? [P]

Yeah, recognition of something else [L]

It's like mutual respect as well [P]

*So, 1,000 drawings in here [points to head], done by 1,000 people,
recognising the uniqueness of it, is just momentous really! [L]*

(Unedited example fragment of group discussion, UK, 11/10/11)

One third of my practitioner research participants, all UK-based, took part in group discussions, more accurately described as focussed 'reflective' conversations in a small group. The setting for such a group discussion is found in the vignette of arriving for breakfast, at the head of this chapter, and the example above shows the kinds of interchanges between contributors. Group discussions involved between four and six practitioners; I also ran one with project participants, with seven contributors. I facilitated all group discussions,

and with the permission of contributors all were audio-recorded to avoid taking on the additional role of note-taker. I used the same core series of open questions as were used in dialogues to explore themes in a semi-structured way. The practitioner group discussions were very intensive, lasting up to four hours with a break for food. This length of discussion enabled the conversations to become deeply reflective, and generated copious data. The group discussion with participants was shorter, lasting an hour, including tea and cakes, but was also very productive.

Participant-observation

I found opportunities to conduct participant-observation in projects and workshops in schools, an art gallery, outdoor fields and gardens in the UK and a Mexican city park, in church halls and community centres, in derelict or abandoned buildings in Mexico City, and purpose-built arts centres in the UK, on the streets of a local neighbourhood in Mexico City, and the streets of local housing estates in the UK, and in a Mexican maximum-security prison. Field note descriptions of some of these observation experiences appear in Part Two of the thesis, while one example – the lantern parade – was used to open the whole thesis. Participants in observed projects included groups of children from as young as six, family groups, teenagers, adults, groups facing various health issues – from bereavement and depression to dementia – or groups in custody in the penal system. In every situation in which I was present as participant-observer my role was explained to workshop participants, and their permission sought for me to join them and take part in activities. I was able to observe half of my research respondents delivering workshops, participating myself in project

activities, and taking occasional opportunities for spontaneous open conversations with other project participants about their experiences of working with artists in this way. The observations focussed initially on the nature of interactions and responses between participants and creative practitioners. These aspects were observed through spatial behaviours and body language, as well as through verbal interactions (more difficult in the Mexican observations). Not a local community member, I couldn't authentically share the experience of the other participants, but participating did enable me to watch and absorb responses and the workshop atmosphere at very close hand. I was also able to note the style, pace and intensity of activity, and any specific tricks or tools forming a significant part of the workshops.

My methods generated data (albeit in unequal amounts) on three perspectives of the practice I was studying: practitioners' views, my own from observations, and project participants' perspectives (especially in relation to understanding the reciprocal quality of the practice). This was important for my confidence in the analysis stage, particularly because of my own proximity to the subject. By collating different perspectives on the same activity I could test the quality of the data, compare the subtle tones of stories to sound out resonances or discord in perspectives, to gain some distance in my analysis. This triangulation strategy helped me build trustworthiness in my study (Fetterman, 1998, pp. 93-96; Robson, 1993, p. 60).

Instruments for Analysis

Placing oneself so centrally in the research process, being, in yourself, the central instrument for analysis as in ethnography, carries a heavy responsibility to be a thoroughly reflective and reflexive researcher. As well as reflecting on the need for shifts of direction, I had to allow space for self-critique, and for acknowledging realisations of interference with the process due to prior expectations, or to other subconscious influences or preferences. I used a reflective research journal and audio-recordings of incidental reflections to help with this process, by offering a sounding board for doubts and concerns. The reflective practice journal also provided a place for me to use my single, on-going experience of working as an (albeit one to one rather than group) arts and health practitioner to support my research. I used my weekly experience of facilitating singing sessions with 'Katrina' (who suffered a brain haemorrhage many years ago, and has physical as well as some mental disability as a result), as an active way of exploring for myself questions and ideas arising as a result of my research into the work of other practitioners. After facilitating sessions I made notes of observations, questions and insights that had arisen during the hour. Examples below show some modes of these reflections:

Today we sang 12 songs. K was really enthusiastic every time I suggested a title. Sounded like I'd uncovered a treasure she's forgotten she had. Glee. At one point she said I had to stop because her face hurt from laughing so much. When I playfully suggested maybe I should leave, and half stood up (taking her rebuke literally, but knowing she knew I was joking) she said 'Oh no, please don't go!!' also mocking. Humour is so important in our sessions.

(Journal entry, 19/1/10)

Asked K whether she has pictures relating to the words cast in her mind while she sings. She said 'no, I'm remarkably unimaginative!' I was wondering, because I do, and if I stay in my mind with these pictures I feel I share something with K, whereas if I drift in my mind into associated thoughts I realise I'm drifting away from her – ruptured contact. Staying close feels important. Drifting off feels like a betrayal, and as if I'm being selfish, unprofessional. I bring myself back and the connection is restored. (I know this from smiles and glances.). It's a discipline. If there were more people in the session I wouldn't be able to drift. *(but I know now from her response that the connection through images is pretty much just in my head!! Not shared at all).*

(Journal entry, 24/8/11)

She laughed when I said: 'oh gawd, it's February now isn't it?!' and mocked: 'yes, did you miss the change of month in your artistic isolation Anni!?'

(Journal entry, 4/2/11)

These reflective data are different from all the other data generated, and are used as a form of personal action-research, a parallel strand to my main research. I have not incorporated them directly in my analysis of practice, but have used it as a developmental tool for my thinking. I also included in my reflective practice journal the on-going thoughts and ideas about my research design, the challenges thrown up by events, and the complexities of my central role in the process. This tool was essential in supporting flexibility in my approach, and in offering the chance to identify weaknesses or problems with time to respond to them.

Aural analysis

Because I used a loose, semi-structured approach in dialogues and group discussions the material I generated was natural language data: people speaking as they would naturally express themselves, as far as this is possible within the formalised relationships of a research dialogue setting. It was also important to monitor people's comfort with the process (Fetterman, 1998, pp. 44-47), looking for signs of unease betrayed through vocal ticks such as hesitancy, stammering, talking very fast, self-corrections and apologies, as well as visual clues such as nervous eye-contact, restlessness, closed body language and signs of stress. In reality almost all the dialogues and group discussions ran in a very relaxed way, contributors if anything slightly amused by my precautions and concerns for their comfort. In three of the Mexican dialogues I noticed slightly more tension: in the first of these I was aware that the respondent was worried about the language barrier, as he invited a colleague in to help with translation. However he agreed quite quickly that this was not needed and sent his colleague away, becoming in fact so relaxed that ironically I have found the audio recording of this dialogue amongst the most difficult to unpick, because he used colloquial references and humour throughout. In the second example (captured above in the vignette of 'Juan', the 'redhead'), the contributor's initial delay tactics eventually dissolved when he realised he had a considerable degree of control in the direction of the discussion. The third case was more difficult, because the respondent was in a significantly vulnerable period of his life. I was also aware that he had no formal education, and had spent 16 years as an inmate in a high-security men's prison. I felt that being a female researcher was particularly inhibiting in this situation, and recruited the help of my key contact with this dialogue, so that he acted as

a bridge between the contributor and myself, and this felt much more comfortable.

In the analysis process I audio-analysed my recorded natural language data, to avoid extensive use of transcription by a third party, and to remain as close as possible to the subtleties of the data. I place importance on paralinguistic expression such as intonation, inflection, speed and style of delivery, all of which contribute to the authenticity and emphases of any meanings contained within the data (Robson, 1993, p. 10), and these nuances of meanings are lost through transcription. Hearing recordings replayed and the details of voice inflection also reminded me of body language and facial expressions I had noted in the dialogue or discussion group – details difficult to recall in field notes. I initially used NVivo (© QSR International) as an analysis tool (Wainwright & Russell, 2010), which promised the possibility of intensive audio analysis, and coding of audio material. However, after serious technical failures with the NVivo programme I was forced to abandon the software, and try to replicate the same system in my own way, which simply required more time.

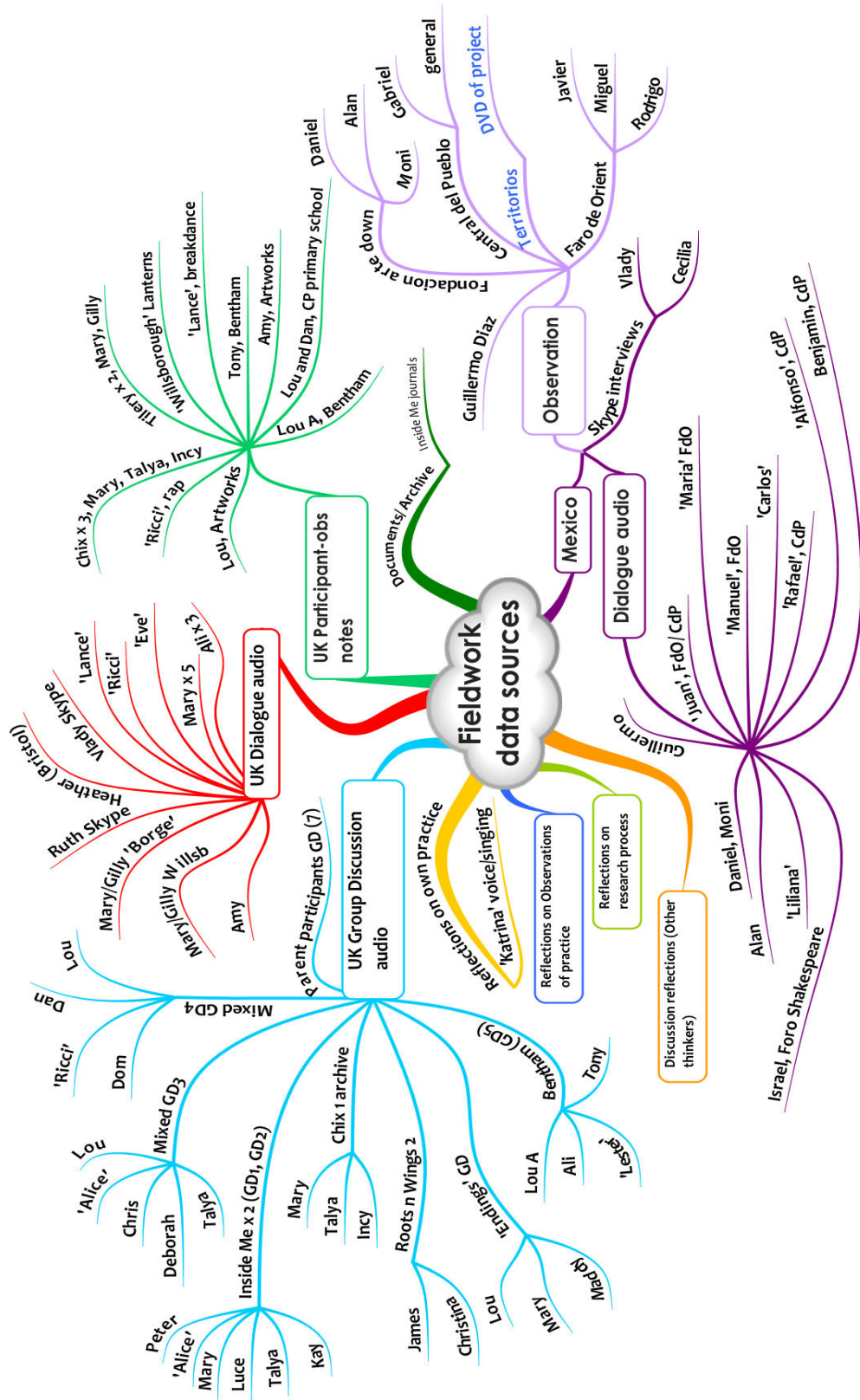
In analysis I used an open coding approach, with on-going thematic analysis, supporting interpretation of emerging themes that was inductive, generated as the research continued (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). With my ears stronger as an analysis tool than reading and re-reading text, I listened repeatedly to audio material, memoing themes as they emerged. In the end I transcribed many sections of audio material, but I left the majority of my data in audio form, for context reference. The combination of the two was useful, because re-checking the audio revealed some instances of ‘theorizing as

ideology' as described by Roulston (2001). This occurred where my reading of a transcript had lighted on a resonance apparent in the use of similar words in the text, which I had logged as a theme, working it into my thinking. However when listening back I realised that the tone or paralinguistic subtlety in the contributor's delivery forced me to rethink the analysis. In the case of the Spanish language audios I transcribed full English versions of every recording, and had them checked by a Mexican Spanish translator, because I needed to check my understanding of the language. However I still returned to the audio often, to recapture the atmosphere, which had been so important in understanding the dialogues at the time. Then as I cited excerpts I transcribed these shorter sections from the audio, in Spanish. Due to space limitations in the reporting section of the thesis I have regretfully had to leave out the Spanish original transcriptions, and what appear in the text are my audio-translated English transcriptions.

Visual mapping and data types

A specific tool in analysis was mapping data visually, adding and linking, growing and shrinking themes, and referencing them to audio material. This system helped me organise and reorganise my understanding of the data, returning with successive highlighting systems, post-its and so on, to draw out aspects of the data landscape. When too crowded I expanded the canvas progressively, to see the detail again. Figure 3.3 below shows one visual map of the various types of data generated and with whom, distinguished as follows: field notes from participant observation, group discussion audio recordings; dialogue audio

Figure 3.3: Data source map



recordings; Skype dialogue audio recordings; personal reflective research and practice journal; video records of project activity; documentary archive material.

On participant-observation visits people sometimes asked me what I had written and I showed them my notes, and explained that I was observing how the artist worked, interacted, spoke, and how others in the room interacted or responded to the artist. This often triggered a brief conversation with them about their perspectives in comparison with mine, which I also noted down. If this kind of interruption to activities felt intrusive I made mental notes of moments or incidents as they unfolded, and made copious notes immediately following the workshop. Having worked as a researcher using participant-observation for several years I have become increasingly able to retain visual and auditory details, and these notes made immediately post activity are often as accurate as, and better structured than, notes made in the midst of activity.

Stepping Back to Theorise

At this point in the analysis, having drawn out themes and characteristics that appeared to indicate practice norms, I was developing a mid-level theory, which characterised the practice; and I began viewing the experiences in both national contexts – the UK and Mexico City – to establish how dependent these practice norms appeared to be on contextual factors. Once the mid-level theory became established as a secure interpretation, I extended my analysis into a social science theorisation of my findings. This focussed not only on the practice level descriptions of the mechanisms of the practice, but also at a

theoretical level to find theoretical concepts to explain the practice in a more widely recognisable academic form. The process entailed investigating conceptual theories from a range of disciplines in search of resonances with the key elements I had located in my mid-level theory, and seeking to describe the practice in these theoretical terms. The interdisciplinary nature of my study dictated that this search was wide, and the pressure of a PhD timescale involved making choices to pursue specific theoretical lines, and not pursuing others. In the end other choices would have been possible, and in this study I have simply begun a process of applying theoretical analysis to what is an immensely complex practice.

Reporting Systems

Throughout this introductory part of the thesis, sections of field notes are used to convey a sense of the research process and field sites. All such vignettes throughout the thesis are marked as 'Field notes', with the country (UK or Mexico) where this is not clear from the context, and the date of the observations. In the reporting section of the thesis (Part Two) I make extensive use of diagrams to help articulate the ideas of the mid-level theory. These were shared with practitioners themselves where possible, who validated them as a means of conveying the elements of the mid-level theory. Extensive reference is also made to data, by quoting verbatim material from dialogues and group discussions. One to one dialogues are tagged as 'dialogue', with the *name* or '*pseudonym*' of the contributor depending upon their preference (see footnote 2 above), the country in which the dialogue took place, and a date reference. For

example: (*'Juan', dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11*). Group discussions are tagged as (GD), numbered, and include the names or pseudonyms of contributors, and a date; an example of a reference would be: (*'Leila', 'Paul', Tony, GD3.1, UK, 11/10/11*). Sometimes, to benefit from their spontaneity, I present the raw versions of field notes; the most immediate amongst these I term 'journal' entries, to distinguish them from 'field notes', which may include post-observation commentary.

All verbatim quotes, field notes and journal entries are indented and italicised, as seen in the examples above. All citations from literature sources are indented but non-italicised, to distinguish them from data references. All contributors quoted are arts practitioners, unless indicated otherwise (for example project participants, project managers). All project participants are anonymized, and to simplify the reading of the text their pseudonyms appear without inverted commas.

Part Two:

Reporting and Describing

Preamble

Introducing a Mid-Level Theory

Beginning Part Two of the thesis I use this preamble to lay the ground for the presentation of my mid-level theory: the conceptualisation of a shared, coherent methodology of community-based participatory arts practice. Five reporting chapters follow the preamble, presenting in detail how distinct, identifiable components of this complex and multi-layered approach emerge from my data. Part Two is then concluded with a Coda, in which I further reprise the conceptualisation of the mid-level theory: termed the ‘practice assemblage’.

The ‘practice assemblage’

I choose the term ‘practice assemblage’ to describe the cohesive construct I have developed (comprising a series of elements of the practice I witnessed), because the term locates a point of intersection between three disciplines which have something to contribute to understanding the model outlined here. The term ‘assemblage’ is associated with art form concepts, as well as sociological concepts of the interactions of social phenomena, and (via

bricolage) anthropological concepts of acts of collecting, sorting and re-presenting forgotten details.

I selected 'assemblage' in part for its associations as an actively creative and radical art form (first coined by William Seitz for his 1961 Museum of Modern Art exhibition 'The Arts of Assemblage' (J. Kelly, 2008)); thereby highlighting specific arts practice components of the work I have studied. In its original art theory usage, assemblage in this context was presented as a close relation of collage (Phillips, 2006), with links also to bricolage and mosaic, all art forms which bring together many parts to form a whole. Subsequent art theory interpretations and manifestations of assemblages have moved beyond the form's original, disruptive 'non- or antiart' connotations,³ and now lean towards the other side of the original art form concept, whereby in assemblages:

Entirely or in part, their constituent elements are performed, natural or manufactured materials, objects, or fragments not intended as art materials. (William Seitz, cited in Kelly, 2008, p. 24)

This reading supports my usage of the term, by drawing attention to the interdisciplinary nature of the practice I am characterising whereby, (as will be explored below) it comprises several practice elements comfortably at home within non-arts disciplines, and reframes them as valid components of this participatory arts practice.

The second assemblage concept I borrow from is the well-established theoretical strand in sociology developed by Deleuze and Guattari, which has since travelled into many other social science and scientific disciplines, and to

³ Such connotations would have rendered the term less useful as a descriptor for this practice, since it was not the declared intention of the practitioners in my study to make an 'antiart' statement through their work.

the hands of other scholars. DeLanda defined assemblages as ‘wholes whose properties emerge from the intersections between parts’ (DeLanda, (2006, p.5); cited in Mar & Anderson, 2010, p. 37). At the core of this assemblage concept is an emphasis on ‘adaptivity rather than fixity or essence’ (Venn, 2006, p. 107), and a focus on emergence, and the dynamic interactivity between the different elements coming together in an assemblage. This is a useful understanding here, and appropriate for an emergent characterisation of a fluid and dynamic ecology of practice, such as the one I am studying. I also borrow the qualities of the original French term ‘*agencement*’⁴ contained in the Deleuzian term ‘assemblage’: ‘an assemblage’ using the English nuances of the term can imply focus on the entity itself, viewed as if completed and with settled properties, while ‘*agencement*’ implies greater emphasis on its workings, dynamism and development.

Thirdly I am interested in an anthropological reading of assemblage which nods to Lévi-Strauss’s ‘*bricolage*’, a concept he launched in ‘La Pensée Sauvage’, a year after Seitz’s ‘Arts of Assemblage’ exhibition. In ‘*bricolage*’ the emphasis is on ‘a process of combining the leftovers of culture’ (J. Kelly, 2008, p. 26); a nuance which is only relevant here perhaps in as much as the skills involved in the practice in my study were often unrecognised as specific or of any value by the practitioners themselves. The anthropological gaze is useful, however, in that it both reinvests the human agency stripped out in the anti-

⁴ I am interested in Deleuze and Guattari’s original preference for the term ‘*agencement*’ in French, for which ‘assemblage’ has become the accepted though rather inadequate English translation (Deleuze and Guattari rarely used the French term ‘assemblage’, despite its proximity to the same word in English) (Phillips, 2006). The everyday French word ‘*agencement*’ is used for concepts of arrangement, the fitting or fixing of things: for example ‘arrangements of parts of a body or machine’ or how several parts affix, or fit together; and ‘one might use the term for both the act of fixing and the arrangement itself’ (ibid, p. 108). DeLanda’s working of assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006) also supports this emphasis. ‘*Agencement*’ includes therefore a helpful accent on the process, movement and change, and the interactivity of connections within the assemblage, preventing any conceptual atrophy.

humanist Deleuzian reading of the concept, and, according to Kelly, redirects the ‘antiart’ radicalism of Seitz for a modern context:

If assemblage’s radicality, then, was rooted broadly in its avant-garde challenge to artistic tradition, an excavation of its interconnections with anthropological thinking reveals an emphasis on process and action that is inseparable from the use of diverse materials and the agency of the assembler him- or herself. To read assemblage via this confluence of ideas is to bring out a different kind of subversive character from that imagined by Seitz in 1961, [...] becoming less an object of contemplation and poetic transfiguration than a tool for doing things, perhaps by roundabout and covert ways – a means of taking action via the apparently benign debris of everyday culture.’ (J. Kelly, 2008, p. 30)

Kelly’s interpretation here highlights a socially applied quality to ‘assemblage’, as well as an activist intent, both in tune with the practice for which I have chosen the term as a descriptor. Throughout Part Two, then, I offer an articulation of a ‘practice assemblage’ which combines the active creativity of the arts practitioner in its assembly, the dynamic interactivity of its interconnected parts, and the ever-emergent quality of its specifics, with the potential of its agency, in the hands of the ‘assemblers’.

*A diagram to assist conceptualisation:
An assemblage of six elements*

I suspect that this participatory arts practice which, as I have demonstrated in previous chapters, to date has remained obscure and extremely difficult to pin down, might be very easily further complicated and obfuscated by beginning here with a detailed linguistic articulation. To help guard against this I present

first a visual-conceptual drawing of the whole, which will provide a foundation for the linguistic characterisation that follows it.

'*Assemblage Figures 1-7*' below show a sequential graphic representation, beginning with the foundation graphic of participatory arts practitioner/s with a community group. Assemblage figure 1 depicts any such scenario, as defined earlier under my study parameters: an arts practitioner or practitioners (central teardrop shape), not bound or regulated by a therapeutic or professional framework in their work, engaging with a group of participants (small blue semi-circles), in a creative workshop context using any art form. (The boundary of the workshop environment is depicted as a thin, external outer line in orange). This event takes place in a community setting rather than an institutional healthcare setting (external context not depicted), and the practitioners use a participatory arts approach.

The diagram sequence then introduces the six essential elements of the 'practice assemblage', common across my study. The first element is *intuition*, indicated here as a pink shadow around the practitioner, (with the hint of a reflection below, to highlight the reflective component in intuition as seen in this work). This first element is outlined in Chapter 4: *A Practice of Intuition*. The second element is personal histories and motivations (indicated by a green upwards arrow and pulses), and the third a framework of values and principles within the workshop (indicated here by the purple spreading atmosphere and dashed arrows, to show dissemination). Closely related, these elements are both outlined in Chapter 5 below: *A Practice of Commitment and Values*.

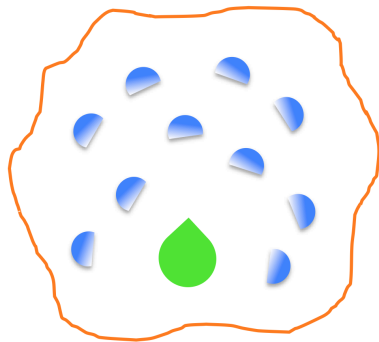
The fourth element is a framework of positive relationships, built on trust, (shown here as a broad, blue boundary, with fluid properties) which is outlined in Chapter 6: *The Relational Framework*. The fifth element is a

framework of bounded space, in the physical and non-physical realms, (indicated by the inner, yellow fluid boundary, containing all activity and participants) which is outlined in Chapter 7: *The Spatial Framework*. The sixth and final element comprises the creative stimuli introduced by practitioners and is termed the 'Creative Key', as it is so central to the practice assemblage, marking this out as an arts-based practice. Alongside art form activities, aspects of the creative key include more generic creative processes, which work towards change or can facilitate transformative experiences.

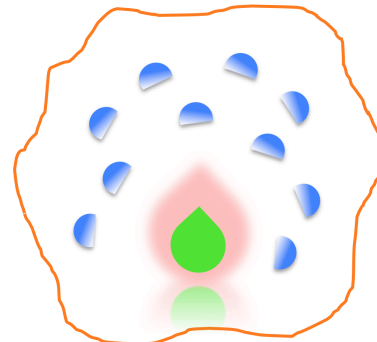
The creative key is located within the green teardrop representing the arts practitioners, and is depicted here as a complex texture. This element is explored at length in Chapter 8: *The Creative Key*.

In the final figure below, then, the entire practice assemblage of six elements is shown in a single diagram, portraying a workshop practice of elements, assembled together and interacting through people and place. The whole creates a dynamic workshop 'ecology' as I have termed it – where arts practitioners are applying their expertise to facilitate transformative change, health and flourishing with the people participating in their community based workshops.

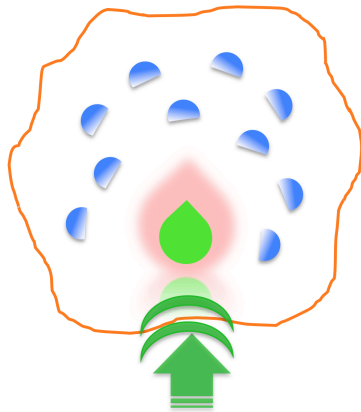
Assemblage Figures 1-7 in sequence, adding elements one by one to the diagram



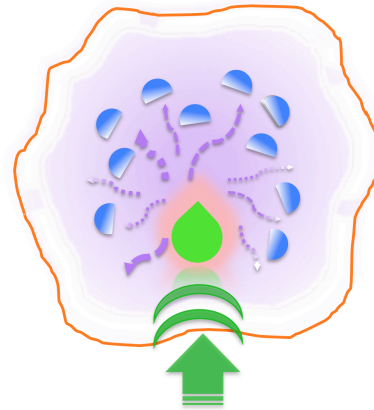
1)
Basic depiction of workshop



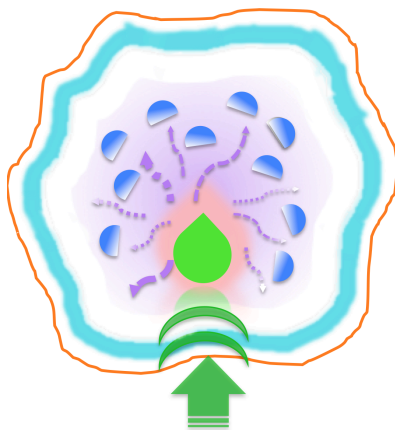
2)
*Adding first element: intuition
(Chapter 4)*



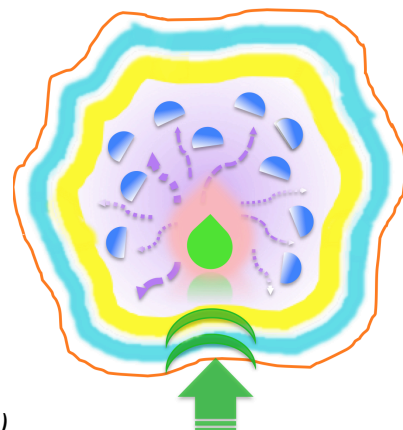
3)
*Adding second element: histories
and commitment (Chapter 5)*



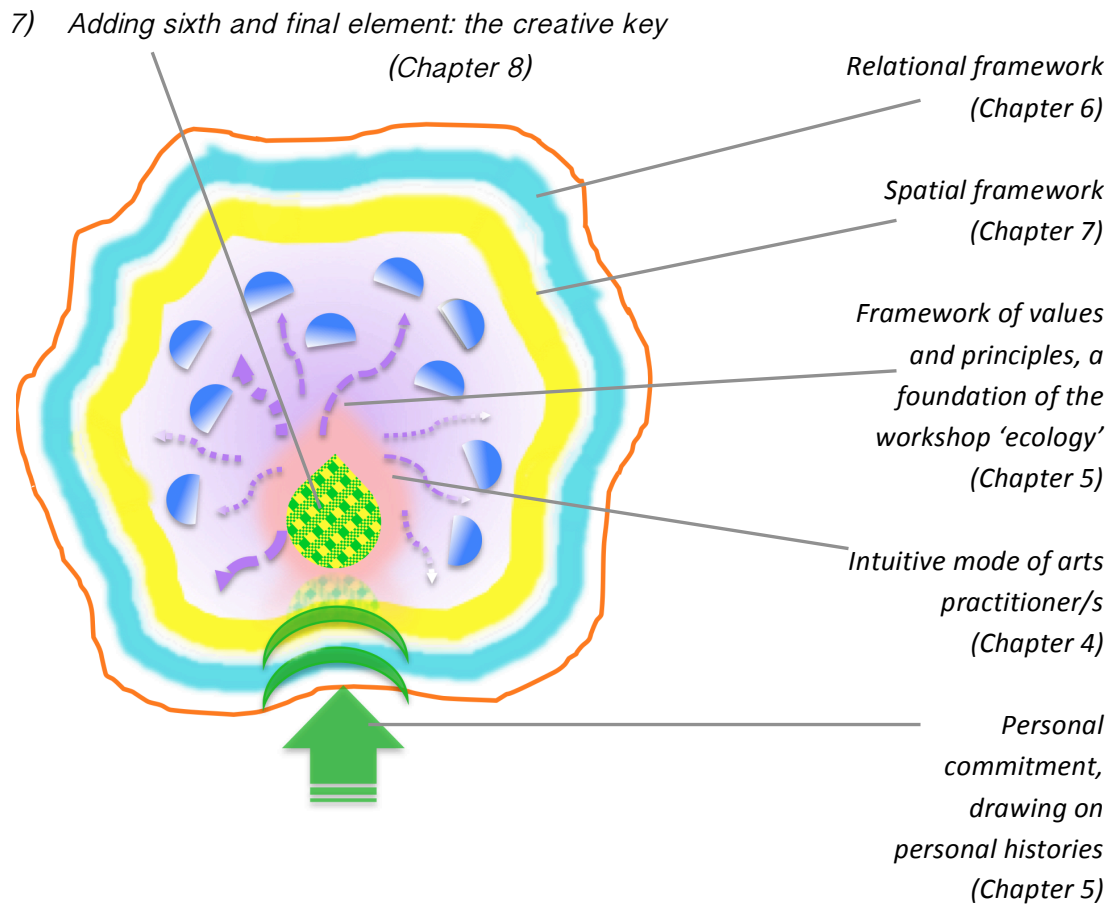
4)
*Adding third element: framework of
values and principles (Chapter 5)*



5)
*Adding fourth element: relational
framework (Chapter 6)*



6)
*Adding fifth element: spatial
framework (Chapter 7)*



Of course, many elements are not depicted here. These include physical aspects of the situation: the nature of the physical environment, creative tools and activities in which people are engaged, characteristics of individuals; and non-physical aspects of the situation: communication between all in the space, emotional and other non-physical characteristics of individuals, individual and group responses to activity and engagement, reasons for attendance, timeframe etc. Because every workshop is different, each of these aspects respectively is so diverse that their inclusion would undermine the potential generalizability of this representation. They are therefore not depicted at all and remain implicit, in order to keep the graphic as simple as possible.

The many factors outlined above as remaining implicit in the diagrams will, of course, always play a role in the scenario, and therefore are not ignored in the research process and analysis itself. The contextual conditions, such as project partnerships, resources and time constraints are also not depicted, in order to retain a focus on the internal workings of the practice in the workshop.

While employing the word 'assemblage' to refer to a practice methodology, I use the term 'ecology' to refer (metaphorically) to an understanding of the entirety of the organic, dynamic participatory arts environment created by the practitioners. Deriving from the Greek '*oikos*' ('home'), 'ecology' describes the study of complex 'home' environments, and as well as describing the study of organic environments, has been applied by other scholars to the study of social, emotional, economic and numerous other systems, which involve interactivity between elements and their environments. Huynh and Alderson (2009) offer a useful concept analysis of 'human ecology' which, applied for the nursing context, focuses centrally on an understanding of people's behaviours, beliefs, emotions and perceptions. Annas (1995) with reference to medicine, and Clark (1997) in relation to environmental philosophy, both emphasise the value of the ethical dimensions inherent in the term 'ecology', deriving from its application in the ethical study of ecosystems. I also find these ethical dimensions resonant, in using the term for a description of the whole complex environment created by the practice assemblage: the ecology of participatory arts practice. Hence, for this thesis, the practitioners use the 'practice assemblage' (depicted above and outlined in the ensuing chapters), resulting in a rich, participatory arts 'workshop ecology', in which people, creativity and change can flourish. The six elements comprising my mid-level theory of the 'practice assemblage' are now explored in detail, in the five reporting chapters of Part Two.

Chapter 4

A Practice of Intuition

'...it can come out your finger tips'

Almost universally across all research sites, arts practitioners made reference to the contribution that they felt 'intuition' made to their practice. This section will explore what they mean by the term, interpret this element of their approach, and discuss the implications of this finding for the wider framing and interpretation of my research.

In the following excerpts from dialogues with Mexican arts practitioners, each discussed what they see as the primary elements of their practice that enable them to lead effective, transformative creative workshops:

Well, the most important thing that I used, and I think I share this with my colleagues here, the first precept that we used was being intuitive. The main thing is intuition. First and foremost.

(Juan', dialogue, Mexico 11.11.11)

[Researcher] *How do you know or decide what methods to use ... ?*

...I try to go in ... extremely ready to listen, to understand, and above all, use intuition to sense what the group's real needs are.... I don't choose specific working methods in advance. I hope to plan together with the

group, I don't usually bring a proposal already elaborated in minute detail, I'd rather find a direction from one day to the next for the route we want to and need to travel together.

(Cecilia, written responses to research questions, Mexico, March 2012)

It's something intuitive. Its like knowing how to make something – a piece of art: you have to analyse the material, and the tools one has, that's my take on it, I think.

(‘Manuel’, dialogue, Mexico, 26/10/11)

These excerpts assert a high value placed on intuition, together with observation, listening and sensitivity, as an important group of interdependent approaches with which these practitioners were prepared to begin working with a group. They discussed believing in the value of judging in the moment, that this was a cornerstone of their approach, even of developing their craft. This is a perspective explored in greater detail in the following dialogue between four British arts practitioners, at the very start of a four-hour group discussion.

‘Blaggeurs’

(GD4, UK, 11/10/11)

This kind of situation [group discussion] confirms that when you reflect on it, things that you're maybe doing automatically or intuitively – this can kind of confirm it, and then it's I suppose a kind of confidence building thing. Even more so because you think 'actually I am doing something that's solid' whereas before I thought 'I'm just making this up, I'm muddling through!' then you talk about it and it's: 'Oh no, no I have made choices about what I'm doing' maybe I didn't know I was making choices, but...

(Dom, GD4, UK, 11/10/11)

This opening comment describes an undermining discomfort in believing that you, as practitioner, are not in control of your own facilitation process, unsure

whether 'intuitive' decision-making is completely unconscious or subconscious; and then a sudden awareness of the deliberate element to this process, which becomes clear only through joint reflection on the workings of the practice.

In the actual [workshop] practice, the 'ability to blag' I would describe it as, is fundamental. (R)

[Several voices] *(It's true!)*

When we started doing workshops (I was just going through some papers the other day and I found some workshop plans,) we used to plan every single workshop meticulously, to the minute, and some of these documents were 7 pages thick; and we did that so thoroughly for about a year, and then it got to the point when we no longer needed to do that, and we could just pick from the experience, and also from our 'blag' ability. A lot of what had come about – in our workshop plans – actually came about from the 'blagging' we had to do in the previous workshop. We'd created our plan, and the plan had to go out the window more or less, because something else was presented. So we had to very quickly 'blag it'. And that then went into our next plan, and so on until the point came where we knew how to use what we'd already experienced, and blag upon that as well.

(Ricci', GD4)

'Ricci's' responding description introduces the concept of 'blagging', which articulates a mildly self-parodying perspective on making decisions in the moment, apparently without specific, pre-planned strategies to govern them, because plans had been abandoned. 'Ricci' explains the practitioners' flexible and responsive impulse when faced with the unexpected, drawing on implicit or latent knowledge (knowledge they are unaware they have) and skill to enable 'blagging' (finding solutions in the moment). He recognises that the 'blagging' in previous workshops had produced valuable processes and approaches, which were then incorporated as ideas in subsequent workshop plans. Finally, with

time and growing confidence, the 'blagging' process becomes what the workshop practice is based upon: judging, remembering, recasting and creating in the moment.

[Researcher] *So you don't write them [plans] now?*

No. (R)

[Researcher] *If someone asked you to, could you?*

Yes, on occasion I do. If its something where I'm slightly out of my comfort zone with, I'm not doing something I've done a million and one times before, I may write a plan. (R)

Its funny I find that I have to write, I don't write plans, but I have to write what I'm going to do (I suppose it is a plan) hundreds of times over, even if it's the same thing that I know inside out, I actually really know what I'm going to do, I still have to write it out every time..... it's funny how I have to write it out in order to feel that I'm ready. Even if I don't even have it with me. (L)

Do you ever write – because I'm writing loads, and then I ignore them completely..? (D)

Yeah, yeah, completely! It's like it's out there... (L)

I've got my plan, and I've looked at their faces, or I've looked at the room, and it's out the window... (D)

('Ricci', Lou and Dom)

This subsequent section of the dialogue highlights that the practitioners' responsive impulse in the workshop setting itself, overriding prior thought and planning, is in tension with a sometimes anxious need to prepare mentally through excessive – even obsessive – writing of plans. Despite appearing contradictory, these two aspects of practitioner behaviour are, I suggest (based

on practitioners' comments), interdependent: an awareness that formal planning will not often offer a useful guide in the workshop setting results in practitioners using prior reflection, to create easier access their subconscious resources, to support more spontaneous decision making, and draw on implicit or latent knowledge.

That's the blag thing isn't it, that's where like you say, when you've written 100 plans out, and it just becomes like a database in your head doesn't it? So you go into a room, and you assess it, and then you just pick the thing that's going to fit, to get you going, and then it builds from there, doesn't it.
(Dan)

I don't understand the word blag...? (L)

'Blag' is the ability to intuitively think on your feet! [laughs loudly]... and operating in such a way. (R)

(Dan, Lou, 'Ricci')

Summarising a further analysis of 'blagging', Dan suggests a term that in reality describes intuition as a complex, spontaneous response, fed by extensive prior preparation and an organised range of prior experiences on which to draw for inspiration in the moment.

The use of the term 'blag' – recognised by three of four in the discussion group – is very interesting in this context, as it has other connotations which lend it subtle nuance, and perhaps echo certain insecurities that derive from a practice based in intuition. Such insecurity is revealed, for example, in the self-doubt and unease expressed in Dom's first comment in this dialogue, which itself was typical of contributions from many practitioners. 'Blag' is a term often used elsewhere to describe acquiring something by minor deception (somebody might say they had 'blagged some pens from work' for example), and the

dictionary definition includes ‘an act of using clever talk or lying to obtain something’. Combined with the French-derived ‘blague’, which as a noun means ‘a joke, or piece of nonsense’, and with ‘blagueur’ meaning joker (Oxford English Dictionary), there is a cocktail of implied meanings and connotations involved with the term; these nod to themes repeatedly associated with the figure of the artist in my study and their skills, as will emerge throughout the thesis.

The associations of the term with acquiring something by minor deception lend weight to the arts practitioners’ own commonly expressed uncertainty as to the legitimacy of their profession. Since their work is complex and hard to grasp, and yet has so little outside acknowledgement, are they to be taken seriously? Is this a real job, or really a ‘piece of nonsense’? The association of ‘blagging’ with stealing also hints at the discomfort many practitioners expressed with regard to the payment for their work – which is another theme to which I return later. Here it manifests as an implicit, self-directed accusation of getting away with theft – are they getting away with taking money for old rope? If they are working intuitively, feeling that they are making it up on the spot, how can they be sure of what it is worth?

Improvisers

During the quoted dialogue the group manages to bolster a collective sense of the legitimacy of their intuitive activity, and the discussion then moves on to explore similarities between ‘blagging’ intuitively, and the concept of improvising:

[Researcher] *I suppose, could you call it improvising?*

It is, yeah, it really is. (R)

But actually you can't improvise without having a huge amount of knowledge can you? (L)

That's it, blagging requires that (R)

And confidence. (D)

So it's like, it's like behind that preparation is tons and tons of stuff. But actually then you can throw it out the window because it can come out of something else, it can 'come out your finger tips', or whatever. (L)

I think – the term is 'unconscious competence', I think. Because there's four levels of competence, there's: 'unconscious competence', 'conscious competence', 'unconscious incompetence', and 'conscious incompetence'... (R)

[Much laughter].

(ibid, 'Ricci', Lou, Dom)

The discussion here touches on levels of consciousness⁵ in a learning process, to pinpoint where 'blagging' might fit. The group tackles the idea of improvisation more comfortably than the intuitive 'blagging' they have been exploring up to this point, able to assert the high level of skill and experience required for *improvisation*, which is a more established concept within art-form and creative methodologies. Schechner frames the improvisation process usefully for purposes here:

Too often those interested in improvisation feel that it can arise spontaneously, out of the moment. Nothing is further from the truth. What arises spontaneously is the moment itself, the response is selected from a

⁵ This is a reference to Howell's five-stage model of communication competency: i) unconscious incompetence, ii) conscious incompetence, iii) conscious competence, iv) unconscious competence, and v) unconscious super-competence. (Howell, 1982)

known repertory and joins with the moment to give the impression of total spontaneity. (Schechner, 1974, p. 477)

The UK dialogue discussed above can be compared with the following contribution from Mexican arts practitioner 'Maria':

I use improvisation a lot, but I basically come with an idea of something that we're going to work on. If I come with a theme, ... the idea of working with colours; so I bring different coloured paper with me and I suggest something, something else might come up when we're here. Even to the extent that the idea I had changes and we do it in a different way. I'm not fixed in a way that: 'we have to do it like this' or whatever – you know what I mean? [...] so yes, there is something prepared. Before arriving here I already have an idea that I'd like to use, also an idea about the people – I see their personalities, so it's like... I work with many elements. I'll adapt it to the people who are there ... And fortunately there's all the experience we have; the experience you have, you can transform it and adapt it to the people who are with you, so that you find your way through, but by a different route.

(‘Maria’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

‘Maria’s’ explanation presents a similar mixture of experience and pre-planning, combined with flexibility, sensitivity and responsiveness, resulting in an improvisatory fusion of elements in the workshop setting. This is improvisation which, while anchored in an original stimulus, is then fuelled by what the artist encounters in the room, and is also drawing creatively, in the moment, on the resources of her own experience – according to Schechner’s point, above, the only real basis for improvisation.

What can be drawn from this material is the prominence, when reflecting on how the practice appears to the practitioner, of references to states of mind that are not consciously decisional, but are constantly deciding; are not consciously analytical, yet are constantly assessing numerous factors to drive

their choices; are not consciously in control of the process, yet are constantly guiding and facilitating individuals and a group dynamic. These are ambiguous states of mind, they are difficult to unpick, but are nevertheless very familiar to artists. Below, two further excerpts from the UK group dialogue refer to the sensation of such states of mind, and to their link with successful creative outcomes:

It is interesting that thing where if you perform or something – well I used to perform a bit – that the one gig I remember doing badly was the one that I was conscious in the act... well I was self-conscious, (I'd hope I was conscious, because I was 30ft up in the air!!). It's like, when I'm painting, the times when it's going really well, I've no idea what's going on, and time goes funny as well. So it might be 5 seconds of another zone. And the times when I'm trying to make decisions, which is a very self-conscious act, it doesn't work. And the same in this other practice (whatever you want to call it). The times when you're just on a run of feeding what's going on, I mean it's kind of another zone. (L)

They're the days when you suddenly realise the day's finished. And you feel like you've just started. (D)

But you know how it's been brilliant, because it's up there, you know you're alive with what's going on. (L)

(Lou, Dan, GD4, UK, 11.10.2011,)

In this exploration Lou reflects on similarities between her successful versus unsuccessful performance experiences, her most successful compared with unsuccessful moments in her own arts practice, and successful participatory workshop experiences. She distils as a key factor in all three situations the disruptive influence of being too conscious or present, and the benefit of being in a different, less conscious mode, where a sense of time is also altered. She describes the exhilaration of this experience. The description

has resonances with Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow theory' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), which I will return to when discussing *The Creative Key* in Chapter 8. For now, however, a further exploration of the sensation of this, what we might call 'intuitive' functioning, and 'improvisation', appears in this final excerpt from Group Discussion 4:

In my workshop practice and all that, I feel like, I dunno, I've got about a 1 in 3 hit-rate, because all I'm trying to get to is that time of 'flying,' of that time when 'I'm not thinking about this', you're just responding, there are great ideas coming from here and there, you can just see it on their faces, so they're really engaged, that's fantastic, but that's not most... (D)

[Others]: No

The conditions have to be right, affected by maybe what they've had for dinner... (Dom)

And the other workshops aren't negative because they don't have it, it's just that... it's a bit of an addiction to get to that... (L)

Yeah, when they fly. But it's not – I don't even know whether it's even 1 in 3, but it feels like about 1 in 3 – yeah, that was one where 'it' happened. (D)

[Researcher] 'It', yes, what is 'it'?

I always think of this 'functional room', I just want the room to be 'functioning', I just want the room working. (D)

[Researcher] You're talking about 'it', and you're saying it's 'functioning'... which is an interesting term because it's very mechanical

That's what made me think, because the 'jigsaw' was all kind of happening... 'functioning' – I'd never think of a word like that. ... I had a session yesterday, I was so pleased with myself because....

I moved into what was happening with the group, [gives details], ... the whole room was just working, in a way, and I just had an idea about doing something else that might work within it, and I brought it in, and the other practitioner said 'wow, did you see how they just took that on instantly?' because I could then step back. (L)

(Dom, Lou, GD4, UK, 11/10/11)

The terms here: '*flying*', '*functioning*', '*working*', '*happening*', all convey the experience of a fluid, dynamic 'ecology' within the workshop, and like '*jigsaw*' include the sense of many parts fitting or meshing together. For many there is exhilaration in the experience: '*fantastic*', '*addiction*', '*wow!*'; and from the previous excerpt: '*brilliant*', '*up there*', '*alive with what's going on*'. The experience, which is clearly positive and powerful for these practitioners, is something they also link with the best examples of their successful participatory arts practice. This experiential element of the practice, from the arts practitioners' perspective, may offer insights into the workings and effects of creativity itself: aspects of the power of creative processes, which I will explore further later.

Despite often working in highly structured and professional institutions such as schools or prisons, where others may be required to conform to strict professional codes of conduct, arts practitioners will fight to retain the freedom they require to respond spontaneously to the situation as it presents itself, as described in the passages above. The following excerpt from a different group discussion highlights one practitioner's awareness of the contradiction of her situation in such settings:

I feel incredibly free to be myself, whilst in the moment of it, and I don't feel that there's particularly loads of stuff hanging over me, or loads of codes of practice, other than what's inherently kind of part of what I naturally do. (L)

[group agreement].

But it's just really practical, kind of obvious stuff for me, that's about being professional. Because actually, weirdly, a lot of what I do is about purposely being 'unprofessional', if you know what I mean. (L)

[Researcher] What do you mean by that?

Well - basing decisions on emoti- on feelings and emotions, rather than... (L)

(Luce, GD2, UK, 20/7/10)

Luce is testing her thinking on the paradox of this situation: how can you 'be yourself' when you're not free? She claims a confidence to assert a different mode of operating as appropriate to this creatively infused work. The excerpt makes the link to a related point highlighted by many respondents: the sense that this practice comes 'naturally' to them, and is an inseparable part of them. A similar theme emerged in the earlier discussion, in which Dom described the usefulness of reflecting with others in order to gain a sense that his practice even exists. Luce's discussion with her colleagues here typifies contributions made by arts practitioners, at different points during my study, showing the difficulty they have disentangling the way they work from their understanding of their own identity:

It's hard, because it's so second nature that you don't even realise that it's a... you don't initially recognise it as a skill.

(Luce)

In terms of identity I find it really useful to talk like this, I find the sense of my identity strengthened by talking with you [researcher], and also finding your own 'yes, this is what I do!' (P)

Mmmmmm (A)

It's reaffirming, it is a thing! it is a thing! (L)

(Peter, 'Alice', Luce, ibid)

For many of my research respondents, their sense of their work and their sense of themselves are so linked that it was very difficult for them to explain why they practice the way they do, as they often feel they are just 'being themselves', as Luce expressed it above; and hence for many the term 'intuitive' became a useful proxy, as something which is perhaps inexplicable. There are echoes here, too, of 'Manuel' in the vignette in Chapter 2, who was reluctant to finish our dialogue, because it was helping him to disentangle questions 'we carry around with us anyway'. My task in the discussion below is to attempt to distil the key components of the intuitive aspect of participatory arts practice, which practitioners themselves are too close to their work to grasp.

Interpreting Intuition in Participatory Arts Practice

Since the term 'intuition' is used and applied in different ways by respondents in my research group, here I anchor references to 'intuition' in my research data using ideas on intuition found elsewhere in the literature, to support an interpretation of the concept within participatory arts practice.

As explained above and as I will explore in more detail later, the practitioners in my study were obviously so close to, or bound together with their work that they felt they themselves embodied their practice: that their practice was a deep part of who they are as people. They could experience feeling ‘unconscious’ of the process during its execution, and most found it very hard to get enough distance from their practice to take an analytical perspective. Indeed my research findings reveal that these practitioners tended not to process what they perceived or experienced in an analytical way (as their contributions in the previous section highlighted – that by discussing together they could find some clarity). Instead they tended to engage more readily in the qualitative processing of feelings, atmospheres and resonances, and reflected using metaphors to capture meanings, and distil learning.

The intuitive approach is considered from various angles in the literature on practice and the practitioner. The approach suggested in my study is close to Epstein’s ‘mindfulness’:

Mindful practitioners use a variety of means to enhance their ability to engage in moment-to-moment self-monitoring, bring to consciousness their tacit personal knowledge and deeply held values, use peripheral vision and subsidiary awareness to become aware of new information and perspectives, and adopt curiosity in both ordinary and novel situations (Epstein, 1999),

However my research respondents’ approach lies somewhere between this, with its stronger emphasis on a conscious reflexivity, and Schön’s framing of the “art” in certain practices as a ‘feeling for phenomena and for action that I have called knowing-in-practice’ (1983, p. 241). Schön himself, interestingly, balances this with the need for a conscious element: ‘reflection-in-action’.

Claxton suggests constituent aspects of intuition including ‘a heightened sensitivity to clues’, and an ability to absent the mind: to use creative ‘reverie’ and to ‘ruminate’ (Claxton, 2000, pp. 37-40). He also highlights a link to feelings:

[T]here is with intuition an essentially affective tone, an emotional involvement on the part of the knower. (ibid, p.41)

This is useful for my analysis, as is another aspect – a relationship to experience (which in turn echoes the description of a ‘*database in your head*’ by one practitioner above):

[I]ntuition is often more a matter of drawing upon and extracting meaning from a largely tacit database of first-hand experience, than it is of rational deduction. (ibid)

The references here to ‘tacit’ knowledge are interesting, since in its conceptualisation by Polanyi (1958) ‘tacit knowledge’ was a form of understanding that could not be articulated, and therefore was not possible to convert into ‘explicit’ knowledge. If intuition relies upon the tacit, the implications of finding such a strong, and universally cited, intuitive element to the practice I am seeking to characterise presents some challenges. Articulating what is truly taking place in a scenario where the leaders themselves feel they are drawing on an intangible combination of insight and reflex, in which time dissolves, and they can even feel afterwards that they have been almost in an altered state of consciousness, is problematic. A direct approach to discussing practice was unlikely to yield much about the more deeply-buried processes, and in my research dialogues with practitioners I took a new direction, encouraging more deeply reflective discussion, and seeking out personal history narratives. My

informants laid a trail of small insights through their intensive reflections, which have pointed to a possible conceptualisation of their intuitive approach.

The intuitive process and the virtual 'practice archive'

In a passage cited above, Dan described the feeling of drawing from a '*database in your head*', suggesting a relatively ordered storage system. Another respondent described a '*constant, reassuring sense of having all that stuff, right there just behind me*' (Mary, UK, 20/1/11) on which she could draw, indicating a space over her shoulders and behind her head. Based on such contributions, and narratives such as 'Maria's' above, of her session working with colours, I suggest a metaphor to convey the character of intuitive practice identifiable in this work. Akin to the way in which most artists will compile a physical or web-based archive, or a portfolio, as a record of art work they have produced, participatory arts practitioners seem to be constantly building a mental and emotional '*virtual archive*' of experiences and situations, drawn both from previous workshop scenarios and also from their own lives more broadly; situations in which they have responded creatively, to find a positive solution to a challenge.

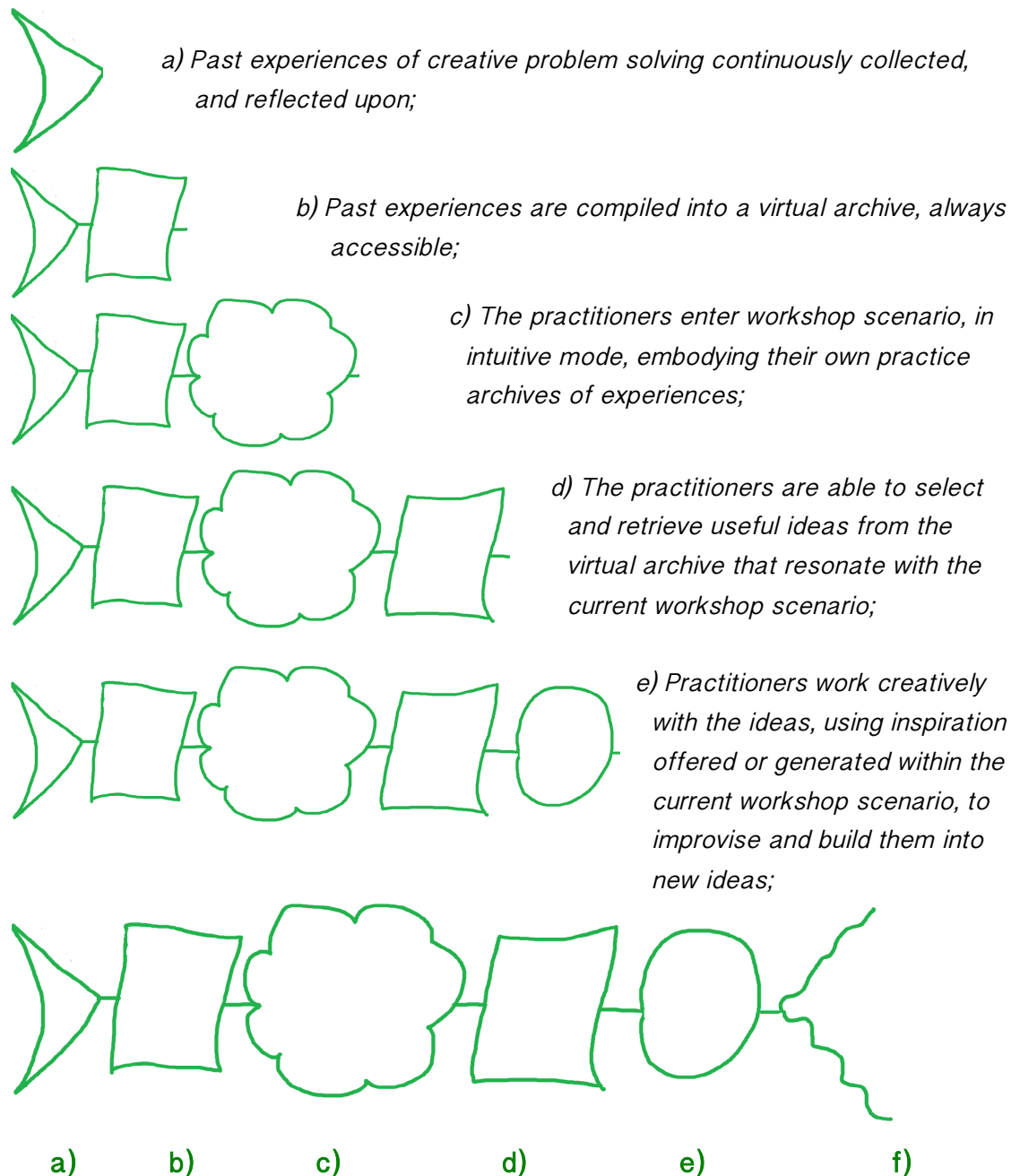
This bank of memories, I suggest, becomes their internally stored practice archive, which is always open, live, or active; a body of work and experiences to which they have ready access, so that it can '*come out your fingertips*' (cited in the dialogue above). When in a workshop situation, whether or not they have a structured plan for their session, they will be (subconsciously) assessing resonances from the group, sensitive to mood, needs and dynamics in the space. From their virtual archive of prior experiences and solutions, they

will draw ideas or creative responses, which might offer something of value to the current scenario. The choices are based on an affective match in resonances, moods, needs and dynamics between the previous and the current situation, their memories of how they felt when previously working with these ideas, and their own sense of how positive the outcome was on previous occasions. Despite the complexity of this process it occurs in an instant, with little conscious awareness of the process itself. Discussing this idea with one practitioner she added that she also questions her selections at this point, since the first ideas can sometimes be flawed choices; so her intuitive process over time has developed into selection with reflection – subconscious with conscious, a combination like Schön's framing above – to keep an eye on quality.

However it was clear that many practitioners preferred to work with what their subconscious process offered them intuitively, with less conscious reflection at this point. Once ideas have occurred to them, practitioners then work creatively, in the moment, to mould and adapt these (which could be activities, a response to behaviours, a change in direction), so that they can engage effectively in this current situation.

The sketches below (fig 4.1) outline this process in stages. The aim is to open up new or different possibilities, for example to move something on, or to tackle a destructive dynamic. The linear sequence outlined in fig 4.1, shown as if a simple, step-by-step chronology of stages should, in fact, be understood more as a pair of interconnected cycles, as depicted in fig. 4.2 (following fig 4.1 below).

Figure 4.1: Stages of the virtual 'practice archive'



A final depiction of the whole intuitive archive sequence, including f), the open-ended outcome of the improvisation stage, generating new possibilities within the workshop. This experience is then also stored in the practitioner's virtual archive.

Within this cycle, stages a) and b) continue always, looping to feed the growth of the archive. Stages c) to f) constitute the use of the archive in the workshop situation. Stages c) to e) recur and recur during the workshop process, feeding the current delivery of practice through repeatedly dipping back into the virtual archive, each time passing through intuitive processes at stages c) and e). This pattern is represented in fig 4.2 below.

Cycles building the virtual 'practice archive'

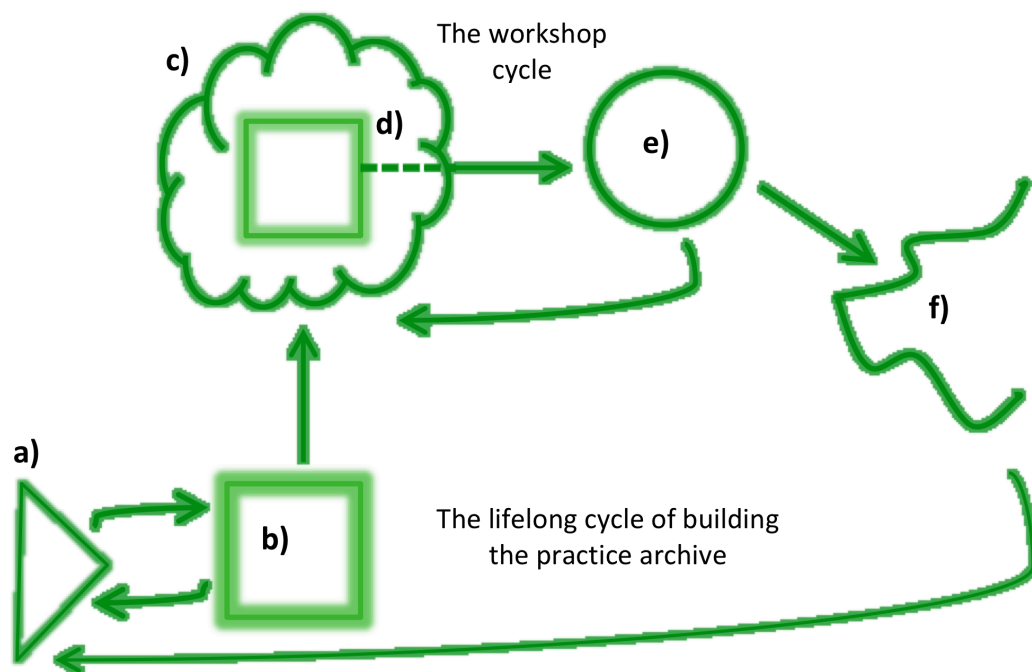


Figure 4.2

Since developing this conceptualisation of intuitive functioning, I discovered an interesting four-stage model of how intuitive leaps occur, offered by Sennett (2008). His model describes the intuitive process of the artist as 'craftsman': making their artwork. However he generalises from the particular, by the use of abstract concepts: the four stages comprise 'reformatting, adjacency, surprise,

and gravity' (ibid, p.212). In his conceptualisation the intuitive leap begins with either stage one or stage two – stage one is the 'what if?' mode – 'Intuition begins with the sense that what isn't yet could be,' because the tool in use is either not fit for purpose, or could have different applications (ibid, p.209). This is 'reformatting' (ibid, p. 210), and he explains that this recognition itself relies on established technical skill, or specialist knowledge. Stage two, 'adjacency', is whereby 'two unlike domains are brought close together' – 'to think about what they might but didn't yet share.' (ibid, p. 211). In this stage imagination is very active. After these two stages, in either order, at stage three 'you begin dredging up tacit knowledge into consciousness to do the comparing' (of dissimilar domains), '– and you are surprised.' He explains that this triggers 'wonder', which could also I believe be interpreted as inspiration. Stage four is the 'recognition that a leap doesn't defy gravity' (ibid, p. 211) – which is to say that this intuitive leap will not solve everything, but that it opens up new territory, moving things forward. Though much simpler than my model, there are resonances here between Sennett's model and mine: the use of prior experience, sensitivity, imagination, comparison, inspiration, and the final stage of open-endedness mediated by reflection.

Different emphases, different processes

My data suggest that, although arts practitioners themselves often talk of intuition and improvisation almost interchangeably, the two approaches overlap but are not in fact synonymous (as suggested in the term '*blagging*', explored above). I have identified them as two distinct processes, which arts practitioners may often be using in combination, or in sequence.

To help clarify this, in the paragraphs below I cite examples from my data, which exemplify a distinction and a difference in emphasis. The first (i) is an example in which I identify an *intuitive* approach, used by arts practitioner Talya in workshops, which may not involve much technical improvisation; this example could be seen as remaining within stages a) to d) of the above sequence. I then juxtapose this with a second (ii) which is an example of a sequence of steps within a workshop scenario which can be identified as more purely *improvisational*, circulating around stages c) to f) of the above sequence, without drawing specifically on the virtual archive resource I have described at a), b) and d).

(i) In the following example Talya described how her response to 'reading' the group, using intuition, could lead her to drawing on a stock idea, which she often uses without necessarily needing to improvise, because the whole idea already contains problem solving and other creative processes, and is already open-ended:

So I'd do a couple of introductory sessions with a group to start to get to know them, then I'd kind of naturally start going 'this group are wanting to do....'... and there's things that I come back to time and time again. It's part of my core practice, and it still informs my practice as an illustrator, and it's words, which I like. And it's a really simple thing that you can adapt very easily. I've got different coloured bags, and they're in rainbow colour order. And there are different words that I've typed out and laminated, in the bags. Each child comes up to do a lucky dip – so they take one word out of each bag. So it's random but the syntax is workable. So it makes a silly sentence that makes sense but is nonsensical. It's a crowd pleaser – the kids crack up. It's instantly a hit, but then you get to have these really interesting conversations that can be illustrative like if you've got to draw something that's clockwork, or super-powered, how do you draw that?

(Talya, GD2, UK, 23/5/10)

(ii) In the second example Lou explained the experience of being startled, then shocked, by her own improvisatory process, which was unfolding quite dramatically, moment for moment.

We'd always work on stories so.. there was a structure to the session, and it was built up – I think the session was about Romans, so we built up a volcanic story, there was going to be Vesuvius erupting, so they'd do visualisations, and lie down, and draw... I suppose really what I'm going to say is that it was something that I changed very... without reason, to a certain extent. And what happened is the children had built these models, which was this village that they had been part of, over several weeks, and they all had jobs in the village...; and I became instantly a God of destruction, because I just trod all over their models!

[Gasps from others]

And I was really shocked about what I'd just done – I think it was one of the most shocking things I've done.

[Researcher] *Can you remember, how did you become this God of destruction? How did it happen?*

I just... I mean this sounds – it's terrible... I don't think it was a negative thing happening before, but I thought how far can I push something... from fantasy and reality mixed in. So we were doing lots of noises and things, for this volcanic eruption or whatever it was, and then I – and then I just started trampling, and it just went completely silent.

[Researcher] *Did you tell them: 'I'm a God of destruction!'?*

No no, God no. I had to explain it afterwards, because I couldn't work out almost why ... But what was interesting is, that was very close to – God, you know, it's opposing a lot of what I preach, because I'm trying to get children to work for several weeks on doing something, developing something, and then I'm having – well it's control, and destroying their stuff!

[Researcher] *Can you remember what was happening just before – anything about why that started to happen?*

I think I felt so, I felt... I mean I'm not sure if this is true, but it kind of feels it's true, that I felt very in tune – it felt everybody was in tune with what was going on, there was a kind of fantasy...

[Researcher] *A vibe?*

With the story that you were... (C)

– yeah, oh I wouldn't have done it just for [show] – because that would have been the wrong way. Everybody – people weren't in a schoolroom, they were actually living it, so I just - went - very - It shocks me, I mean I was really shocked myself, It wouldn't have come from nothing... ...it was a half term's work!

Did you have a plan (that) you were going to do with them? (C)

No, not at all! ...well, there was an underlying route (for the term) that we were going to go down, but we didn't know quite how we were going to get there. So it's not from nothing... ... It definitely didn't come – I mean it was spontaneous, but it was definitely not from nothing, it had come from weeks and weeks of work.

(Lou, Chris, GD3, UK, 18/8/11)

What these two examples show is that there are different aspects to what practitioners are calling an overall 'intuitive' approach, and although there are elements in both examples of sensing needs or options by being 'in tune' with participants and the ecology of the workshop (intuition), and also of playing with ideas in the moment (improvisation), at different times different emphases are chosen.

The facility I am calling an intuitive practice archive itself becomes an ever-increasing, individual resource, with some of the ideas and creative

responses it contains building a strong profile, through being selected and adapted on many occasions. Dan described the archive concept as a '*database in your head*', suggesting a relatively ordered storage system; while Mary's '*constant, reassuring sense of having all that stuff, right there just behind me*' on which she could draw, related to a space over her shoulders and behind her head. However most respondents conveyed a much less tangible sense of where they were drawing ideas from, suggesting a less conscious set of associations at work, to draw inspiration from within themselves. I now look at these associations.

Sparks and flashes - the stages of the intuitive process

Crucially in this schema, the metaphor of the practice archive itself does not encompass the entire intuitive process arts practitioners identify in their practice. Two even less tangible parts of the process need more unpacking – these appear in the set of sketches in the figure above (figs 4.1-2) as c) the stage prior to selection of an idea or ideas, and e) the stage, post selection, of their adaptation. These stages (the most similar elements to those described by Sennett's model) are perhaps where, within the intuitive process, the individual creative sensitivity and talent of an excellent arts practitioner is at its most concentrated. These are the points at which they experience a spontaneous spark of some kind, which fires their imagination.

At point c) there is the process of finding an affective match, to guide the selection of the germ of an idea or combination of ideas from within the practice archive. Practitioner Ruth pinpoints this moment:

In the micro-moment.... there's a real subtle sense of deep intuition around how am I going to approach this person, how am I going to talk to them, where are they? I think that some of that is kind of really reading them.

(Ruth, Skype dialogue, 3/4/12)

The spark practitioners might experience at this stage is, I suggest, the *flash of insight*, (the accompanying sensation can be a sudden mental skip, similar to a heart skipping a beat, and a sense of sudden illumination, like the traditional 'light bulb moment'). I unpack insight a little more below, once I have outlined the second stage.

At point e) there is the process by which, using the resonances and ideas from his or her own archive of experiences, each practitioner works creatively in the moment, to adapt and build a bespoke response to the current workshop scenario. This is a stage which, I suggest from practitioners' accounts, is fuelled by *sparks of inspiration*. These may perhaps stimulate a similar sensation to the 'flash of insight', but they seem more often, from descriptions above, to feel like a sustained adrenaline rush, finding yourself doing something, the mind moving at speed, a feeling of '*feeding*', '*flying*', perhaps too fast for normal consciousness. This experience is the process by which the practitioner synthesises ideas drawn from past experience (the archive) with elements and ideas presented in the workshop around them, and employs improvisatory skill to harness and build on this in the moment, resulting in new hybrid ideas that can open up new possibilities. This highly creative stage of the intuitive process is, I suggest, a method, built on the specific skills of improvisation, as outlined previously by Schechner.

Intuition, insight, inspiration, improvisation, imagination

Throughout this chapter I have introduced five terms, each prone to mystique and rather intangible in its own right, and which are often blurred into a mass of inexplicability: *intuition*, *insight*, *inspiration*, *improvisation* and *imagination*. The findings I have from my research suggest a separation and distinction of these five concepts, so that they can be seen as interdependent but discreet elements of some very obscure creative processes. Using the virtual archive idea to represent the intuitive practice resource, the difference between the *intuitive* and the *improvisational* approaches used by arts practitioners can be clarified as follows.

An *intuitive* approach – exemplified by Talya’s word game (i) above – is, I suggest, not a method, but a state or *mode*, in which sensitivity, listening, observing, empathy, and being open enough to take in the entire ecology of a (workshop) situation, can result in the flashes of *insight*, introduced above⁶. Such moments are when the practitioner is suddenly able to make connections between events or experiences, between happenings, expressions or communications, which might not ordinarily appear to link, but their connection offers a new, or suddenly deepening understanding of something – a moment of ‘adjacency’ according to Sennett’s model cited above (Sennett, 2008, p. 211), or ‘bisociation’ according to Koestler (Koestler, 1949, pp. 36-37). A flash of *insight* of this kind can guide the practitioner to a response, a solution, an idea or combination of ideas (in this case sourced from their virtual archive), which might be useful, perhaps in an unexpected way. This is therefore the *intuitive* mode, which facilitates an *intuitive* outcome.

⁶ A similar ‘flash of insight’ concept is also explored as a phenomenon of clinical practice by Downie and Macnaughton (2000, pp. 99-102), where trusting a ‘leap in understanding’ of this kind is discussed as an element of a ‘humane’ approach to general practice.

An *improvisational* approach – exemplified in extremis in Lou’s volcanic story (ii) above – is, however, not a mode but a *method*, in which the practitioner employs improvisational skill to ‘read creativity forwards’ in the words of Ingold and Hallam (2007, p. 3), and cited in relation to techniques similar to those I describe here by Oliver, in his study of improvisation amongst hospital clowns (J. Oliver, 2009). By ‘reading creativity forwards’, using a distinction between open-ended creativity, and closed, product-focussed ‘innovation’ (which, according to Ingold and Hallam, reads creativity backwards and closes down ideas to single out a product (2007)), I refer here to arts practitioners being *inspired* creatively by ideas coming from other people in the workshops, or from the situation itself. Practitioners then build creatively and spontaneously on these ideas that are inspiring them, feeding them from their own creative resources (including from their virtual archive), and opening up new possibilities in the workshop. This is an *improvisational* approach, using a method and skills playfully, to facilitate open-ended outcomes.

During these processes, arts practitioners are drawing throughout on another resource as a form of fuel. This is the main tool of any artist, and what I am suggesting is their first language: their creative *imagination*. The imagination is their home turf, the ever-active dimension in their lived experience, and to which artists turn to apprehend reality – as Dissanayake has it, ‘artists exhibit a hypertrophy of an ability that is present in all human beings’ (1974, p. 212). This fifth concept is neither a mode nor a method, but a *capacity*, and within their practice provides the fuel for the sensitivity arts practitioners require to be intuitive, and the onward development of the ideas they use in improvisation. In Chapter 8 below, I will consider whether and how the artists’ imagination, engaged within a facilitation process of this kind, may

mark their facilitation approach and outcomes out as distinctive, taking a different route from other, non-artist-led approaches.

Of course these concepts cannot be simplistically compartmentalised, since in practice they always interact and feed each other. The result is a series of complex creative processes that leave many arts practitioners themselves feeling heightened, exhilarated, in a state of '*peak attention*' (*Eve, dialogue, 23/1/12*), and their workshops apparently '*flying,*' and creating the buzz and loss of a sense of time described by the practitioners in GD4, above. In this way, from the perspective of practitioners the whole process can blur into a rush of inspired yet inextricable and inexplicable sensory experiences and creative links, which, when pushed, they call 'intuition'.

The discussion in this chapter has sought to locate the main points in these complex processes at which each of the five concepts *intuition, insight, inspiration, improvisation* and *imagination* can offer a more specific understanding and mapping of the sequences of creative impulses and their outcomes, as employed by participatory arts practitioners in their workshops. I have sought to lay the interrelated approaches of intuition and improvisation as an underlying foundation, underpinning the further articulation of a core participatory arts practice, as explored, presented and critiqued by my research respondents. Having discussed 'Intuition' as the first key finding from my research I now continue a systematisation of my further findings. In Chapter 5 below I move on to outline research findings relating to the personal histories, and the motivations and drivers of the community-based participatory arts practitioners who contributed to my study.

Chapter 5

A Practice of Commitment and Values

The room is a hive of industry this morning. Parents are in overdrive by the French windows, spooning dry sand into 100 brown paper bags to create ballast against the wind, for outdoor lanterns – it's a team production line. The rest of the room is filled with tables strewn with materials, paper lantern structures, and children in aprons, hands sticky with PVA glue. Mary and Talya are amongst the children, deeply involved in helping add finishing touches to each unique structure, ready for the event due to kick off in less than 6 hours. So much to do. Despite the stage-management stress they must be carrying, the artists offer nothing but calm positivity, and praise:

*'That is fan - **tastic**!'; 'A spiral – what an amazing idea!'; 'You're cooking on gas this morning – everything you say is a nugget of wisdom!' [shakes the child's sticky hand]; 'That is a great decision!'; 'Oh look, this is lovely!'; 'That is absolutely fabulous...' 'Be still my beating heart – look at this one!! – it is **gorgeous** my friend, well done!'*

These exuberant expressions are delivered with warmth and good humour, and invariably raise a wide smile. [Original emphases indicated]

(Participant-observation field notes: 20/1/11).

Positivity in the form of praise, and its central role in workshops, is perhaps the most widely shared phenomenon in this work. Typical of the colourful language of praise and positivity used, the observation above provokes the question: What is the rationale for this unerring positivity?

Practitioners described working their positive attitude towards people into their practice in three ways:

I believe that each person carries in themselves some grams ('seeds') of their creative selves, and many aren't familiar with this part of themselves. They need help to discover it. It's their creative potential. And when they discover it, they have become a different person.

(Guillermo, dialogue, Mexico, 6/11/11)

The workshop leaders ...the majority of them only give praising comments ... 'it's marvellous... it's really cool!...' - they prefer to animate, stimulate with a positive commentary.

('Alonso', Project director, dialogue, Mexico, 14/11/11)

....'Oh that's brilliant! Keep going, it's great!'...I think that's a real nub - that kind of affirmation - of everything; because once you start to do it on a small scale, it comes into everything then.

(Tony, GD5.II, UK, 3/2/12)

Positive attitudes were expressed firstly in a foundational conviction that everyone can be creative, and a belief (expressed here by Guillermo) in the powerful effect of such a faith in others' creative capacity: that in itself this positivity can be transformative; secondly (as described in the participant-observation, and referred to by 'Alonso'), practitioners expressed consistent affirmation of people in their workshops, and of their efforts: in order to challenge and stimulate them. Thirdly, in common with all the principles and values prized highly by practitioners, I observed that positivity (as Tony suggests) became a currency: by demonstrating and encouraging this way of relating, not only between themselves and workshop participants, but also between other people within the workshop space, it became the workshop norm – the way things worked.

Such hyperbolic praise appeared to have a positive effect in the sessions I observed not least, I suggest, because it is underpinned by the accompanying values of honesty and authenticity, discussed further below. Practitioners appeared in my observations at all times to be genuinely inspired by participants' ideas; many demonstrated a capacity for wonder, and an ability to meet each encounter with renewed delight:

That 3 o'clock in the morning idea of 'why do I do this?' it's ... that I love those marks – every time – it's the first time that anybody has produced it in the whole history of the universe! it still SO excites me! [contributor emphasis indicated]

(Lou, GD4, UK, 11/10/11)

Communicating this genuine interest was something practitioners considered very important if praise were to achieve any impact (as seen in the example dialogue extract in the previous chapter); and drawing on my previous experience of project observations as an evaluator in the field, I have witnessed less convincing attempts at praise, where a practitioner has appeared too tired or to be under too much pressure, during project delivery, to communicate authentic excitement. In those observations participants indeed appeared unimpressed, even disappointed in receiving the praise; however such examples were not observed in this study.

An assertion was common that affirmation of individuals' work is received as affirmation of the individuals themselves, and communicates a powerful personal endorsement:

I will celebrate the smallest of things – that's key to everything. I believe that if you make people feel like somebody who achieves, they become somebody who achieves.

(Amy, dialogue, UK, 16/12/11)

The smallest creation is given status – a small scrap of folded paper, which a child felt 'looked like a swan' is put on the shelf to be admired.

(Field notes, 20/1/11, p.1)

Practitioners also described the importance in these kinds of situations of waiting for, and finding your 'moment' to praise, in which it will be heard and believed; this is a judgement practitioners claim is crucial:

The workshop gives you the safety net to just go for it. And that's when the praise comes in... you find the moment to go 'THAT is Brilliant!'.... then you're offering them the chance to go back out there, and stick their head up and go, 'I'm confident' ...

(Dan, GD4, UK, 11/10/11)

A more subtle approach than this is important sometimes, to communicate positivity in a way that will be believed and understood by project participants who lack self-esteem. In the following field notes of participant-observation at a music production project with teenagers in the care of the Youth Offending Team, the arts practitioner uses powerfully understated, subtle praise, using minimal verbal exchange, augmented by body language:

'Ricci' – quiet and low key – sits beside a more troubled, withdrawn young person; both wear headphones. 'Ricci' helps him select tracks from a computer and nods along to his beats, smiling. He gives occasional gentle interjections: 'Try this ...' (they both listen, nodding to the beats) 'Yeah?' [seeking a response from the silent youngster].

'Good choice.' ['R' smiling approval, in response to a track chosen by the young lad, still nodding to the beats].

Another young person sketches his 'tag' [name] huge on an electronic graffiti screen. 'R' sees this and spots a moment: 'Save it!' 'Ricci' calls to him, grinning, thumbs up. Less is more in this approach. But it's all about affirmation.'

(Field notes, 28/8/12)

Thus, practitioners display the third, more strategic application of positivity as a value, as they weave it into the fabric of their workshop atmosphere, making it a guiding principle and a hallmark of the practice. Although not in itself directly articulated as such, practitioners' dealings with positivity and affirmation could amount to a philosophy of countering the negative with the positive. But, from where does such a capacity for positivity arise? From where do practitioners draw their ability to sustain it?

Converging stories

To understand the roots of their practice, and the resources feeding their intuitive approach, I asked research contributors to reflect on the origins of their involvement in their current work. I asked them what they believed they were doing in this work, and what motivated them to continue practicing for long enough to build up a significant body of experience in the field. This chapter reports their responses to these questions, and considers the contribution of this background context to an understanding of the practice itself.

Reflecting on the origins of their involvement, arts practitioners invariably outlined events, influences, encounters and developmental paths dating back to childhood, which they identify as having brought them to use this practice as an application and expression of their creative skills. Distilling the sources of their current work motivations, practitioners highlighted their individual philosophical perspectives, values and principles, which they explained were also intrinsic to their current practice in a variety of ways. Based on these linkages between life

experiences, values and convictions, and their approach to the practice, I report these findings thematically.

People's motivations for involvement in this work are of course complex, and specific to each individual. However despite the diversity of practitioners contributing to my study, and their enormously varied individual backgrounds, interesting echoes emerge in the data. The examples presented below, though attributed to the individual speaker, represent common threads of experiences or viewpoints, indicative of themes emergent across the breadth of the study. Findings are presented under three recurrent themes: experiences in creativity and the arts; experiences in activism and communities of shared purpose; and experiences of marginality, building personal resilience.

Creative and Arts Experience

...and then I saw 'Welfare State', and I thought bloody hell, this is for me. It seemed bizarre, it turned me on, I thought – uahhh!! [gasp]. I didn't quite know what it was, but I thought – 'this is something like High Mass – a mixture of High Mass and revolution!' A mixture of ritual and something that I didn't quite understand, but which drew me in, and clearly meant a lot to the people of Burnley...

(‘Lester’, GD5.1, UK, 1/2/12)

One experience shared by all practitioner respondents is their extensive involvement with the arts and creativity, from childhood to the present day. For the practice studied here, as explained earlier in the thesis, there exists no formalised training that all practitioners must complete to prepare them for this work. These practitioners are all, however, trained to a high level in their art

form. All but one in my sample studied their main art form at a specialist, elite arts academy, or similar higher education institution, where they trained to be artists, originating and making their own work. (The outlying practitioner has little formal training in his art form, but has long experience and has a strong reputation in his performance discipline, working nationally and internationally). The majority then went on to begin a career as an artist or maker, and most developed a strong reputation in their field. Examples include a theatre practitioner who cited professional performances in more than 70 plays, and who has directed more than 40 others with casts of professional actors, alongside her participatory theatre practice in prisons; a writer with regular plays produced for BBC Radio 4; a dancer and a performance artist who each tour internationally, visual artists exhibiting and working regularly on commissions, a theatre designer still invited to design sets for new touring works, and so on. The director at one project in Mexico City, Jose Luis, was emphatic that having an established reputation as an artist in their field was a selection criterion for their arts practitioners.

However while the majority of practitioners in my study continue to make their own art work, following both paths simultaneously, over a third of practitioner respondents described their process of disillusionment with the mainstream arts world as a key part of their personal history – often crystallised in a moment of realisation:

I was still doing formal theatre, 'black box' theatre (in the theatre space). But there came a moment when I found myself on the threshold of the decision: 'what do I want to do with my life? with this formal theatre career ... and with this theatre world that I've found myself in on the streets?' And I took this decision, which for me was absolutely healthy.

(Guillermo, dialogue, Mexico, 6/11/11)

I came from a family of nurses, - a lot of my influences were about caring for people; being very practical but having a heart there. Being socially conscious. When I went into theatre – as a jobbing actor – I was almost ashamed that I wasn't doing something to help people... I spent ten years learning my craft as a jobbing actor, alongside very interesting and exciting people, but getting very frustrated because it all felt meaningless.

(Heather, dialogue, UK, 9/9/10)

For many practitioners in my study, here expressed by Guillermo and Heather, pursuing a career as an artist – making work for its own sake – was not enough; it did not and does not fulfil them, either professionally or personally. Contributors often recounted inspirational experiences of non-mainstream creative arts, such as that described by 'Lester' at the beginning of this section, which had contrasted with their experience of mainstream arts worlds. Such examples of socially engaged, participatory arts experiences constituted exposure to a different application of arts practice, and a transformative capacity of creative processes, which excited them. Ultimately, these experiences were instrumental in directing practitioners in my study towards their current form of socially engaged arts practice.

The power of creativity

Sometimes people have known fear, or repression ... There have been women who've come here who are on the run, in hiding from their husbands and everything. Well, they transform themselves – it's amazing!

('Maria', dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

A motivation commonly cited for practitioners' current work was the fundamental belief (resulting from their experiences of this other way of making art) in the value for people's wellbeing of engaging in creative processes. They had seen arts activity help people deal with the challenging experiences they encounter throughout their lives, and described feeling inspired to give others access to such processes. Their conviction of the value of creative processes was expressed at many points – drawing both on their own personal histories and on having witnessed other people's journeys through traumas and challenges of all kinds:

I devotedly believe in the possibilities of performance as a tool for transformation. Be it political or personal.

(‘Liliana’, dialogue, Mexico, 15/11/11)

Many people have discovered a lot, I've seen it ... they've found new ways of appreciating themselves, new ways of living, of seeing things, they've become more aware...

(‘Maria’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

Research dialogues clarify that the transformative change often discussed in relation to this work is conceived not in terms of the arts practitioner, as agent, seeking (through creative workshop processes) to transform the individual directly or fundamentally:

The phrase for me was – ‘what do you make of it?’ ... I suddenly thought – that’s at the heart of everything that I do ... – if these things happen to us, if change happens - so what do you make of it? People die, what do you make of it? I do think it’s a very fundamental human thing: we have to make something of it, this thing we’re going through. I think so much of what I do in this work, what I do, is about giving people a sense of ... entitlement to

the process of creativity, and making something of it. We all deserve to feel that we can make something of it – and it's good for us.

(Peter, GD2, UK, 20/7/10)

As conveyed by Peter's realisation here, the 'transformation' the work aims to support is individuals' own transformation of their responses to life events, and to their negative encounters with the world in which they live. His comment proposes that creative processes (in which through confronting something painful, something new can be 'made', both literally and metaphorically) enable those who participate in them to find new ways either to take control of or to accommodate the most difficult challenges they face. Practitioners believe that a communal or community creative process can equally build the capacity of groups of people towards such a goal. In this sense the creative process is seen as a catalyst for a change, owned entirely by the participants themselves. The specific processes by which creativity (in this case 'making something' – a poem, a dance, a drawing) can effect a transformation of this kind are discussed in more detail in the later chapter on *The Creative Key*.

Practitioners consider it beyond the scope of a creative workshop or project itself to predict whether or not this transformative moment or phase, or this new insight, can begin a process of significant change outside the workshop space:

What I try to do is just enable, facilitate, young people, any people around me, when I'm in a group situation, to express their story: to feel that it's worth processing, therefore we have a right to own it, exist in it, and it becomes something that we're not sat on by, but something that we can dance with (if that makes any sense?).... That's it, that's everything I've ever done.

(Alice, GD2, UK, 20/7/10)

They did, however, talk about inspirational examples, such as 'Maria's observations quoted at the beginning of this section. 'Maria' describes seeing that people have achieved a significant change for themselves through participating in their workshops and projects, overcoming a challenge in their everyday lives, and testifying to the potential transformative power of creative processes.

A commitment to quality and reflective practice

We're over two hours into the first intensive group discussion I have convened. As we sit in Mary's back room, holding serial mugs of steaming tea, I have been probing the six contributors about their ways of working. The lively conversation has filled the space with snapshots, crystal clear images of moments both extreme and ordinary. I feel the room packed with the people and the interactions in these tales. After a rare lull, as people reflect silently, I introduce a new question:

[Researcher] What about your thinking processes, what's going through your minds when you're doing things, in the workshop?

I'm just thinking – 'what are people getting from this experience?' (A)

'Is this working? If this doesn't work, what next?' (P)

Or 'maybe this has just been a time waster?' (L)

'I've been talking too long!', 'I've taken too long to explain this', 'we have to move on to some doing now' (M)

'Oh, that child's lying on the floor!' - 'there's a table leg that's about to collapse onto that piece of work!' (T)

You're doing lot's of observing, you're trying to take into account all those individual perspectives, as well as the group dynamic: 'I know he's going to blow any second!' – 'I should give her some blu-tac to fiddle with or something, because she can't sit still' (M)

(‘Alice’, Peter, Luce, Mary, Talya, GD1, UK, 24/5/10)

Reflecting on the important aspects of their work, practitioners noted a deep level of personal engagement in their approach, a commitment expressed on the micro level, as suggested in the vignette above, as well as on the macro level, as ‘Liliana’ explains:

Women have been killed just for addressing gender violence, as defenders or activists... so there is a real risk factor.

(‘Liliana’, dialogue, Mexico, 14/11/11)

Practitioners’ continuing motivation despite poor reimbursement, continual funding uncertainties, and personal cost through emotional exhaustion (touched on again later) demonstrates a high level of commitment. Echoing aspects of the internal monologues given as examples in the discussion at Mary’s house, they also cite constant reflexivity as a quality of their approach within each session. Contact with workshop participants involves a commitment to ‘*peak attention*’ (‘Eve’, 23/1/12).

It requires a passionate commitment, or devotion, in every working moment.

(Cecilia, Mexico, March 2012)

High level artist training, an experience common to all these arts practitioners, encourages commitment to critical analysis of one’s work, a continual refinement to strive for quality, ‘*like a true obsessive*’ (Cecilia, Mexico, March

2012); and this training, I suggest, was evident in their approach to this work.

Mary reflects:

One way or another if we look back on it, which we can now over different events, you are refining things all the time. You are learning from what went on before. You are saying 'we're not gonna fall into that one again'. You are looking for the other kind of situations where it'll be better, or it'll be subtler, or you'll be more able to get deeper, whatever it is.

(Mary, Borge discussion, UK, 10/2/11)

This is self-critique and systematic reflexivity in relation to their work (as that outlined in the discussion at Mary's house); constantly questioning their own practice and actions, reflecting, revising and refining, in striving for artistic quality in process and product. Equally, in the approach to a project or workshop many practitioners are beset by self-doubt about their ability to offer anything:

Often before working with a group I get really quite paralysed around thinking that I don't know anything... sometimes I think oh my God, I don't really know what to do.

(Ruth, Skype, 3/4/12)

I always start fearfully, and with a heap of questions: 'do I really know what I'm doing?' 'Is it any use?' 'Will I be able to communicate well with the participants – will we manage to understand each other?' Mistakes are often made, and I can admit to them ... and we try to put them right together

(Cecilia, email responses from Mexico, March 2012)

The comments above are from practitioners with 20 to 30 year pedigrees respectively. This level of reflexivity, combined with practitioners welcoming critical feedback, suggest that this is a practice that is not ego-led. While self-

questioning may be a common personal characteristic, it is also seen as essential:

One of my fears is if the artist, the person who's doing it: there's the potential that they can become a bit 'the expert', and it can go, it can shift – to me it's a very subtle thing – it's remaining humble. You have to be aware of that.

(Ali, GD5.III, UK, 3/2/12)

As this practitioner's comment notes, keeping the ego in check constitutes an important value for this work, and the line can easily be crossed, whereupon the character of the practice would change. In my role as evaluator I have observed community participatory arts practice in delivery across a wide range of projects in which artists do not handle their egos with such self-awareness, and the result is often damaged relationships within project partnerships, but also project experiences in which participants are less able to flourish.

As a practice drawing heavily on practitioners' intuition (discussed in Chapter 4), within which they need to respond in the moment and often improvise, the self-doubt expressed by practitioners is not surprising. What they will do in a forthcoming session, or have just done, is dependent at least partly on what they may access from some subconscious parts of their individual selves, and this is risky: it may leave them feeling exposed if their approach fails. It requires nerve, as does any improvised performance: I can attest from my own years of experience as a jazz vocalist, working closely with experienced improvisational musicians, that the exposure of improvisation costs a performer, both beforehand and in reflection. Arts practitioners regard their reflexivity as essential, to gain perspective on what they have been doing during a session:

We were having to reflect so much, we were having to work to refine it – but we were able to refine it and refine it and refine it.

[Researcher] *So what role does reflection play in your practice?*

It plays a big role... but naturally in theatre, if you're a responsible theatre maker, that's what you're doing anyway. If you're working with young people, or in education, then you have to keep on doing that.

(Heather, Dialogue, UK, 9/9/10,)

In this way practitioners themselves regard reflection, as well as being a principle of good practice, as a necessary cornerstone of their practice, in order to support their commitment to offering an experience of the highest possible quality they can achieve.

Activism and Political Engagement

[Researcher] *What has been your own journey, that's brought you to do this work?*

My parents were politically active, my grandma was very politically active ... That's my history – it's my responsibility to change the world, to make it a just, fair place!

For me there was a real sense of how that feels to have a vision of a fairer world. It wasn't just a theory. As a kid I really wanted to be part of that in some way: the energy of realising that we have the power to determine our own future.

(Ruth, Skype dialogue, 3/4/12)

Almost half of my cohort of respondents referred explicitly to formative experiences of political activism. These included acts of allegiance with movements of the left as a student, sustained involvement as activists in solidarity with marginalised or disenfranchised groups, and activism as a way of life including involvement in squatters' movements, political street theatre and alternative community living, and a common trend of sustained and serious commitment to political engagement. In the Mexican context practitioners attributed this activism to a sense of necessity and urgency, and, in four of the Mexican personal histories, confronting the risk of violence, and the fear of mortal danger. Such experiences, practitioners felt, in turn generated their world views: including prizing very highly the values of equality, respect and honesty which, as I will outline below, emerge as shared themes in the data.

There was an interesting sub-theme within the personal histories, as some practitioners recounted a longer heritage to their activism; with links to their Jewish history of Holocaust and their grandparents' experiences of persecution, or else a sense of activist responsibility directly related to a culture of political dissidence within their family home when growing up. Ruth's story above, of carrying on the family responsibility to contribute to change, is one such example, as is Mary's realisation of the impact on her of her father's values:

I am my father's daughter in many ways – he was a pitman, and a socialist and all those things. But possibly one of the things he gave me, that before I hadn't fully acknowledged, was a sense of justice, and fairness. All those values things. For me that was quite (revelatory) – I thought 'oh yeah! that's where...'

(Mary, dialogue, UK, 20/1/11)

In Mexico four respondents described witnessing at first hand and being consciously influenced by their parents' activism in supporting student uprisings in 1978. These activists carried the perilous legacy of previous students protests of 1968, which had ended in the notorious 'Tlatelolco Massacre' of hundreds of student activists in Mexico City (Borden, 2005).

Shared histories of activism as described here are perhaps not surprising amongst practitioners now involved in work that seeks to facilitate social and developmental change. However the interesting theme emerges that the activism these practitioners described was born often of a family culture of collective activism, imbibed when young: long-nurtured values of social justice, *proactivity*, working towards something better, safer, more just. I return to this theme later in this chapter.

Equality

That whole relationship between practitioner and participant, for me, is 'participant and participant'. It bothers me that there's a kind of... It's about relationship! Between two people. Not necessarily about – is the arts practitioner higher up than the participant? There's that kind of status thing that I find problematical...

(Ali, dialogue II, UK, 11/2/11)

A focus on equality as a highly prized principle emerges in practitioners' assertion that they meet project participants as human beings of equal value, and in a spirit of mutual respect. Many practitioners – typified by Ali's contribution above – emphasised their personal discomfort with inequalities in status, an incompatibility between who *they* feel they are, and any elevation of

status which their role as facilitator or as artist might imply. This is a very characteristic concern, flagging up a preoccupation with developing *'horizontal relationships'* ('Alonso', Mexico, 14/11/11). Some practitioner respondents discussed the ways in which they feel the workshop process functions as a mutual exchange, underlining an equality of learning. In their separate dialogues with me, workshop participants echoed this impression, recounting an experience of mutual learning and shared leadership:

everybody learning together isn't it, it's not some people saying 'I've got the knowledge and you haven't got it'.

(Mandy, Participant GD.II, UK, 16/2/11)

I think it's the feeling of equality – everybody's equal, you know, nobody's the teacher, nobody's the boss, or whatever... (L)

Yeah we did get made to feel like that didn't we? Because ... it was like talking to a friend! (D)

(Lisa, Donna, Participant GD.I, 16/2/11)

Mary and Gilly are the bosses.. but really we're all bosses – all of us. Mary and Gilly just help us by telling us some of the things we need to do. But my mum knows what to do.

(Kieren, 10, participant in situ comment, field notes, workshop, 2/2/11)

Here attempting to unravel roles and dynamics within the workshop context, and why they believe it works so successfully for them, these project participants suggested that a levelling of hierarchies is achievable in workshops. This theme of status and equality in the workshop environment is framed as a subtle dichotomy in the exchange below with 'Eve':

[Researcher] How do they see you?

Well, I hope equally

[Researcher] You foster equality in the room?

Yes. Absolutely. However, I am also very clear, I hope, about my responsibilities, so that I am being paid to deliver a really great experience for everybody and that is my responsibility. It doesn't make me better, it means that that's my job, that's my role in that room. And I'll do it to the best of my abilities. But we're equal...Absolutely everybody's equal. Full stop.

(‘Eve’, dialogue, UK, 23/1/12)

The tangle of attempts by practitioners to foster interpersonal relationships in which power dynamics are minimised, combined with the sense of responsibility they universally expressed for their role in the workshop process is evident here. This is a complex arena; and practitioners’ efforts might appear idealistic. Indeed some acknowledge – as Ruth below – an awareness of working with idealism:

So I guess quite a lot of the work I'm doing is around providing a space – often a kind of liminal space, (or I've been thinking in terms of micro-utopias) where it's possible to really be how we might want to be in the world for about 3 hours every week, or 10 minutes on the street, we can model that and experience it, and in some ways that shifts who and how we see ourselves in the world at this moment in time.

(Ruth, 16:17-16:55)

The very act of modelling something idealistic within the protective space of the workshop, in order to seed the belief that the same is possible beyond the workshop space, is a strategy practitioners referred to on several occasions. The idea of constructing ‘micro-utopias’ which Ruth alludes to here, and the tolerance for an ambiguity of truths implied by working consciously with

idealism as I suggest, resonates with the pragmatic use of an “as if” philosophy, discussed by Rapport (2003) in which:

acting *as if* their convictions were true, individuals assure themselves of hypotheses of the world which are useful – suggestive and consequential, beautiful perhaps, powerful and satisfying – however much they might at the same time know them to have been made up.’ (pp. 12-14: emphasis in the original)

In a distinction of nuance however, practitioners in my study gave no indication of believing that they were ‘making up’ ‘hypotheses of the world’ for their work, but rather –

we have a wide range of ideas, we don't all think the same; but we all believe ... that reality, lives, can be transformed. I think all the workshop leaders here share the same idea, in that actually - they believe in a utopia.
(‘Juan’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

Practitioners were aware of seeking to foster realities, within the project space, that were reaching towards ideals, utopic realities they believed were worth striving for, in order to breathe such ideals – certainly that ‘lives can be transformed’ – into the real world beyond the project.

Communities of shared purpose

Father Mark - a combination of a very, very thoughtful person, but a very practical man as well. And Luke who was the boss, who was a great thinker and just a lovely person who always had time for you. He had a great sense of humour, and I never felt like this kid... I just liked it so much I just carried on going. I used to go there for weekends. I'd go there and stay...
(Mary, dialogue II, UK, 31/3/11)

The common thread of collective political activism and ideals creates an interesting confluence with another unexpected convergence of experiences discovered amongst the British cohort of practitioners. The result, as I will outline below, is an emerging theme: arts practitioners' formative experiences of the motivating impact of communities of collective or shared purpose. Contributors highlight particular values as important in their work: a passion for people and community, positivity, and optimism (choosing not to see barriers to what may be possible), which may come from these early experiences.

Three UK-based practitioners revealed their unusual experience, as teenagers in a largely secular British society, of having spent several years living within monastic communities, either full time as trainee priests, or as a visiting weekend boarder. In all three cases practitioners stated either that they had never previously told anyone about this part of their history, or that they had rarely mentioned it. Yet each described a significant personal connection to this period of their lives. In the context of unpicking influences on their current practice and on their path to this work, all three practitioners describe a strong formative influence resting less in the religious teachings and more in the highly principled, values-led culture of the monastic community of which they were a member.

I keep quiet about it, partly because there's prejudice about Catholicism, for a start, and it's not understood. But I think it's actually really crucial to what I do.

(‘Lester’, GD5, UK, 3/2/12)

I did have some really interesting conversations; I can remember some of those conversations now. And I think well no wonder it helped form my thinking... I felt privileged to be having the conversations: that was definitely modelled for me.

(Mary, dialogue II, UK, 31/3/11)

As well as the spirit of the group, and the familiarity of ritual in these settings, elements of the culture of the monastic communities practitioners described as influential in their own current work include: commitment to community - *'It's called 'a community'. The brothers.'* (Mary, as above); mutual respect and equality, *'I used to go up and she used to take her wimple off and we'd sit and natter on';* and kindness, openness, humour and humanity, as seen also in Mary's opening quote about the characters she spent time with at the monastery.

Hence there emerge resonances between two kinds of personal history reported as recurrent: the activism born of the nurture of values of justice and collective action in the cradle of the family home, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, and the formative experience of living with a community committed to collective living, humanity and respect, as described here, and alluded to above in experiences of alternative communal living and squatters' movements. The two types of experience share a theme of common collective purpose, guided by strong principles; a link well summed up by the idea that in participatory arts practice, *'We're kind of barn-raising together, in a creative way'* (Ruth, Skype, 3/4/12).

Honesty, affinity and passion

Practitioners in my study talked of feeling moved by and 'passionate' about people, groups of people and communities – an attitude they cited as providing strong motivation for this work, and something which nourished them:

...so that was it for me, that was my baptism of fire. It was amazing, and I loved it, I LOVED - working - with - young - people. I loved it. [Respondent emphasis indicated]

(Lou A, GD5, UK, 3/2/12)

I do this work because it gives me immense pleasure, because I'm convinced that it is a wonderful way of making connections and becoming closer to each other through theatre, poetry, music. Because I believe in, and have a desire to convey and share, a passion for life, and a powerful life force.

(Cecilia, written responses, Mexico, March 2012)

Here the second practitioner sums up a broader perspective, encapsulating the overall optimistic personal outlook already discussed as typical in this work. This prominent theme includes several related guiding principles and perspectives which practitioners propose are key to how they approach their work, and how their workshops function. Practitioners for example discussed (together with the positive inspiration they found in other people, outlined above) an optimism, and belief in people's potential – as captured previously by Guillermo's belief in the '*grams of creativity*'. Perhaps in contrast to the medical practitioner who must focus on diagnosing and healing health problems, the arts practitioners' gaze can be described as marked by an asset-focussed, rather than deficit-focussed perspective. They are generally less interested in focussing on the negative stories of damage, problems or incapacities which can attach to people, what is wrong or lacking, or perceived limits; since their focus and their curiosity lies in strengths and capacities and seeing no limits to what is possible. This is not to suggest a lack of sensitivity towards challenges people face (a capacity discussed in its own right later), but rather a preference to capitalise on the positive.

Although, in the case of these artists, apparently an instinct rather than elective strategy, this ‘appreciative’ approach echoes the ‘capacity-focussed’ thinking of asset-based community development, or ‘ABCD’ (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; South, White, & Gamsu, 2013). In ABCD, ownership of a change process by the people and communities whom it involves is prioritised: focussing on people’s strengths instead of their needs is considered a valuable ‘salutogenic’ (Foot & Hopkins, 2010, p. 8) way to address needs, whilst seeking to support people in building resilience. The proactively appreciative perspective common amongst community arts practitioners has also been described by some as ‘*unconditional positive regard*’ (GD1, 24/5/10; GD2.III, 19/8/10; GD5.II, 3/2/12), after the ideas of psychologist Carl Rogers (1957), which I return to below.

As already indicated, positivity and praise were considered to rely, for effectiveness, on honesty and authenticity. References to practitioners’ desire to present themselves as genuine or authentic within their work were very prevalent; they often claimed that they try to avoid adopting any role within their workshops:

I’ve always had a thing about people and their roles, roles that you take, because I’ve always wanted to be myself; I’ve always been myself, I am unable to take on a role. I can’t, even for anything. ... I’ve always obviously had a thing about that kind of – I want to have a genuine relationship with people.

(Ali, dialogue, UK, 11/2/11)

I try to be normal, to be myself, like.... just like the me I always am - if you met me on the street you’d see that I’m the same as I am in my workshops.

(‘Rafael’, dialogue, Mexico, 10/11/11)

Practitioners expressed that they needed to *offer* genuine openness in order to create an atmosphere of openness, and only in such an atmosphere was change likely to be achievable. To this end, finding some degree of affinity – common ground – between themselves and project participants was often discussed as a familiar and useful process in the work:

I talk with quite a strong Yorkshire accent, and used to be a big bloke with rough hands... and I felt as though I could use that, or I came to see it as a tool. You can communicate with all different kinds of people then on that level....people used to say to me - 'You're a big, rough, Yorkshire bloke! You can go in there and do things!'

(Tony, GD5.III, UK, 3/2/12)

I make no mistake of dropping in on the first session: 'I'm a single parent – child care's a nightmare isn't it?' lack of money and that kind of thing. I talk about that stuff up front, straight away [...] to focus on the things we've got in common.

(Amy, dialogue, UK, 26/12/11)

Drawing on these last two reflections, although these practitioners were seeking to be authentically themselves, they were also describing presenting a *version* of themselves, which they believed was suitable or strategically useful for their work, in this case by establishing an affinity with project participants. These two aims appear essentially incompatible. Constantly in balance with their emphasis on genuine and intuitive responses (which seems to suggest an unpremeditated, even naïve, quality to their approach) practitioners displayed an awareness of agency in their work – the capacity they seek, as discussed, to effect change, and indeed the very reason for believing that their work has any purpose. In this practice they are not pursuing “art for art’s sake” (Singer, 1995). They also display a sense of responsibility to scrutinise this agency, to maintain

consistency with their own values and aims: a moral honing of their intuitive tools as it were.

In relation to the dichotomy of an immediacy and authenticity in self-presentation, yet mediated to a certain extent by awareness of its agency, this paradoxical form of social engagement is perhaps captured by Emirbayer and Mische's temporal reworking of an agency concept (1998). These scholars build on pragmatist George Herbert Mead's three-fold conceptualisation of 'levels of consciousness', which they say recognises conflicting and interacting components of awareness as follows:

immediacy of response to sense and feeling, [...] the capacity to use ideation and imagery in remembrance and anticipation, and finally the culmination of sociality in communicative interaction, in which social meanings and values develop out of the capacity to take on the perspectives of others. (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 969)

Emirbayer and Mische's argument 'delineated the analytical space within which reflective and morally responsible action might be said to unfold', stressing 'reconstructive, (self-) transformative potentialities of human agency, when faced with contradictory or otherwise problematic situations' (ibid, p.1012). Combining the ideas of Mead with Emirbayer and Mische, practitioners here can be understood as jugglers of present, past and future consciousnesses, to conjure up a self (as agent) that is less structurally, and more intuitively sensitised. It is the intuitive element here, I suggest, which reassures practitioners that they are 'authentically' themselves, since – as we have seen in the previous chapter – functioning in an intuitive mode they have no conscious awareness, in the moment, of any calculated strategy in their choices.

Marginality Building Resilience

In practitioners' personal history narratives the theme of having been an outsider of one kind or another was common. The kinds of experiences described include being incapacitated by acute shyness or a lack of confidence as a child (recounted by several individuals), and therefore always retreating into playing alone or into the imagination; having a different background or situation from peers which is not appreciated or accommodated by the peer group – for example having caring responsibilities for parents as a child, suffering serious injury and sustained hospitalisation, being ejected from the family home and made homeless as a teenager; feeling out of place amongst peers or a deep discomfort with social or formal systems; or always being the outsider because of moving house regularly or internationally. These experiences amount to a marginality which is not by choice, but which must be endured – a *marginalisation* from the mainstream which for some practitioners resulted in degrees of isolation. I have already mentioned that many in my sample have marginalised themselves from the mainstream arts world – a chosen position of marginality, born of disillusionment.

The prevalent theme of marginalisation may appear co-incidental, with little direct relevance to my study, except that it gains significance in its contribution to understanding the building blocks of the practice I am exploring when seen in combination with two other recurrent themes. The first is the conscious experience, recounted on numerous occasions, of building personal resilience to overcome difficult situations. The second is the awareness

recounted by several respondents that one's own experiences of struggle and survival can motivate them to enable positive change for others, and even that such experiences can help in this work by offering resources such as empathy and sensitivity, and even potential solutions. This theme was discussed in one respondent group as the 'wounded healer scenario', referring to the concept in common currency for four decades in psychology (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971), and pastoral theology (Nouwen, 1972), explored in relation to patient narratives by Frank (1995), and here clearly explained by one practitioner:

It's like the 'wounded healer' moment, [others: yes, yes] when you've had the experience and you've learnt how to cope with it, you're in a position then to be the wounded healer because ... you've built the resilience. If you've been through an experience of trauma, grief, difficulty, and learnt to overcome it, you know it deeply and you've found the tools and resources through yourself, and therefore you are more in a position to heal, because you've felt the wound.

('Alice', GD2, UK, 20/7/10; one of two practitioner respondents in my sample who have prior training in group facilitation approaches, offering them access to such concepts with which to analyse their approach.)

In terms of practitioners' personal history narratives and the foundations of community-based participatory arts practice, I propose at this point that the kernel of a relationship is indicated here. Based on their intuitive mode of working described earlier, which practitioners suspect draws constantly on their own experiences, past experience builds a personal memory bank (constituting what I have described in the previous chapter on intuition as a *virtual archive* resource). Reading together the key themes of marginalisation, personal resilience, and the 'wounded healer' thinking shared by almost half of my practitioner respondents, I suggest there may be emerging a common

background experience pattern amongst these practitioners, by which their own life histories may have lent them a capacity for sensitivity to other people's struggles. It may predispose them to an allegiance to marginalised groups, and incline them towards this people-centred, social justice-orientated application of their arts and creative skills.

Tools for personal resilience

A theme shared across the entire cohort of respondents was the motivation to offer people systems and tools they could always come back to, to help themselves to build resilience – both emotionally and physically. The reference to health benefits of the work was a constant theme throughout my research contacts with practitioners: the conviction that the work is intrinsically linked to health improvement was universal. In giving a framing of the healing element practitioners perceive in their work, 'Maria' says:

They say 'I had a pain here, I was hurting there, and now it's gone, I feel different' – it's been worked out in some other way.

('Maria', dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

Cecilia's observation is more aspirational than concrete:

Working with the body, discovering what you're capable of, learning to walk, rigorous discipline, looking after your body because it is the tool for your work, the sense of humour you need to smile at your own mistakes, and through this to increase your own self-esteem; how can this not make you feel healthier?

(Cecilia, written responses from Mexico, March 2012)

Anecdotes were recounted of project participants making recoveries or learning to manage their health conditions more effectively, through involvement in projects. They are too long to include as citations here, particularly as my focus is on processes and practice rather than outcomes, but the stories were numerous. There was, however, an interesting tension within practitioners' responses relating to the health improvement attributes of the work, since most practitioners explicitly distanced themselves from any association with the concept of 'therapy', even though some were unsure of how else to convey the process other than using the terms 'therapy' or 'therapeutic'.

I know many people who come, as well as from their need and interest to learn, also very often it's like a kind of 'therapy'.

(‘Manuel’, dialogue, Mexico, 26/10/11)

In the citation below, a project director tries to distinguish where the practice of his arts workers lies in relation to therapies:

They realise that they are involved in a therapeutic process with their participants, that people bring with them many different problems – But they're not formally trained as psychologists or therapists! They're artists! But they need to be aware of how to deal with – not through psychoanalysis, but through art – problems that the participants present: for example violence, relationships, drugs, that they discuss these things through the art ... they don't have to necessarily talk about it, but they need to be able to give people the space to express or grapple with these issues

(‘Alonso’, dialogue, Mexico, 14/11/11)

All but one of the practitioners in my study stated that they had deliberately chosen not to practice as arts therapists or any kind of therapists, with just one practitioner in Mexico breaking the mould and currently training as an art

therapist, alongside her community participatory arts practice. The others had strong feelings about the discomfort they felt with their notions of 'therapy'.

I hate... I don't wanna use the word therapy, because I don't... that doesn't sit comfortably with me at all...

(Dan, GD3.II, UK, 11/10/11)

[Following investigating arts therapy] I think I wanted to preserve the making ... and I wanted to find a way of using it with people that made sense to me. Not sure I entirely trusted all the interpretive stuff.

('Eve', dialogue, UK, 23/1/12)

I don't want to psychologise these moments, I don't want to get myself into a process with him where I'm analysing him ... because for me theatre has reached its limit at that point ... I want us to make theatre, I don't want to do psychodrama.

(Guillermo, dialogue, Mexico, 6/11/11)

Five had considered a therapeutic training but after investigation rejected this path, feeling it was incompatible with their ideas of their practice. Two had completed training in psychology and subsequently rejected this approach. The key differences between the core practice I am studying and arts therapy practices have been previously outlined in the introduction and literature review sections of this thesis. Arts practitioners' contributions to my study on the subject demonstrate the continuing necessity non-professionalised participatory arts practitioners feel to distinguish their work from arts therapies, and to assert its separate integrity – a subject I will return to in the conclusions chapter below. Practitioners did perceive there to be a relationship between their work and health improvements, but saw this – as shown here – more in terms of building a capacity for positive resilience than in terms of therapeutic analysis or treatment.

Inclusion

Throughout the findings on values reported so far, the theme of an awareness of and wish to counter the impacts of marginalisation is constant. Along with the multiple references to their drive to work with marginalised groups, practitioners also demonstrated a commitment to the principle of inclusion: that everybody has the right to be heard, seen, included, and that all voices have a place. This commitment is shown both through their choice of projects: for example working with people with disabilities (all ability dance work), or exclusively with disenfranchised women in Mexico; and also through their ways of working:

The emphasis is on the group, so that we're working together as a group, but in the group, as the facilitator you need to be able to make sure that you're speaking and connecting with every individual...

(Heather, dialogue, UK, 9/9/10)

Practitioners' accounts of their attention to inclusive practices were corroborated by participants' comments on their own experiences of the inclusive group feeling, and furthermore their ownership, as participants, of an atmosphere of inclusion in the workshop space:

Everybody comes together, and has fun together, and they're all, like, knit together.

(Carly, Participant GD.II, UK 16/2/11)

However the actual realisation of inclusivity requires proactive approaches, in order to make an impact on including the excluded. One practitioner, typical of several in this regard, explains below that her strategy may seem

counterintuitive, because she needs to allow people who wish to exclude themselves to do so, in order to understand how to approach the issue:

I'm actually focussing on why people are less willing to jump in the ship and what that's about. So I won't work so hard to bring everyone in, because actually I'm quite intrigued about why people aren't coming in.

(‘Alice’, GD3, UK, 19/8/11)

This echoes the explanation by a Mexican practitioner, that his participants were –

people who live on the streets, loads of young people with no opportunities, addicts, delinquents ... I didn't need to go inside the building itself, they just arrived at the space, which is in a really big garden, and I started working with them.

(‘Rafael’, Dialogue, Mexico, 10/11/11)

He simply works with people where they are – however marginalised, and whether or not this marginality is by choice. By these examples it is apparent that inclusion is a flexible principle – overridden by respect for the choices of the individual participant. Challenging a general stigmatisation of marginal individuals in social groupings, (which may often stimulate a desire to include every individual in the main group), here no assumption is made that inclusion in the main group suits everybody better than elective marginality. Marginality, it is suggested, may in fact be a positive and comfortable position for some: this is an idea to which I return in later chapters.

Respect and non-judgmental attitudes

Very commonly cited by practitioners as a key principle within their work, and which they see as fundamental to a successful participatory arts workshop, is a value closely related to equality, discussed above: that is, respect. The following examples suggest how important this principle is for practitioners:

That goes to the core of some of my thoughts about human beings just in general. ... people say you've got to earn respect, but I don't agree, I believe that every single person – through my experience in life – deserves your respect, just because they're people, that and nothing more.

(‘Ricci’, GD4.v, UK, 11/10/11)

We all respect each other. The students respect the leaders, and we respect them, and so everybody gets on together ... in a very even way, on the same level practically.

(‘Manuel’, dialogue, Mexico, 26/10/11)

Practitioners speak here in very simple terms – respect for each other is a given; a value linked also to the principle of ‘unconditional positive regard’, outlined above as widely adopted by practitioners in this work. Rogers’ ‘*unconditional positive regard*’ is based on a concept he credits to colleague Standal in an unpublished doctoral thesis (Standal, 1954). Rogers summarises this attitude – albeit described in terms of a therapist-client setting – as follows:

It involves as much a feeling of acceptance for the client's expression of negative, “bad,” painful, fearful, defensive, abnormal feelings as for his expression of “good,” positive, mature, confident, social feelings, as much acceptance of ways in which he is inconsistent as of ways in which he is consistent. ... One client describes the therapist as “fostering my possession of my own experience ... thinking what I think, feeling what I

feel, wanting what I want, fearing what I fear: no 'ifs,' 'buts...'" (Rogers, 1957, p. 98)

Practitioners were in fact keen to differentiate their work from that of a therapist. However Rogers' description holds strong similarities with the non-judgemental perspective described by practitioners, as 'Maria' states here:

'You don't give people a label, you don't see people as lower, rather you learn from the other person'.

(‘Maria’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

In searching for ideas to describe their commonly felt allegiance to people whatever their background or challenges, respondents came up with the terms 'humanity' (*Tony, GD5, 3/2/12*) and human 'decency' (*Peter, GD1, 25/5/10*). Practitioners reported the value of such a non-judgemental perspective of people, resting in the opportunities it offers to create a bridge between practitioner and participant built on respect. Practitioners consistently expressed discomfort, as the example below outlines, knowing background information about people other than what those people themselves choose to share:

The first time I worked in a prison in Mexico, they told me the infractions of every single participant who had signed up for the workshop. The secretary came with a huge mountain of files, and put me in a little cubical. I started reading, and very quickly realised that knowing what crime each of the inmates in my workshop had committed was not useful – it was no good for me at all. So I gave back all the material, and arrived to meet them with the conviction that I would get to know them in whatever way they themselves wanted me to.

(Cecilia, written responses from Mexico, March 2012)

They also referred to failed attempts at non-judgemental approaches; some contributors discussed how exhausting it can be to work in this way, and how they regularly feel tested or can sometimes feel defeated by difficult attitudes they encounter. Below I outline 'Alice's' experiences of dealing with some challenging situations, while 'Terri's' contribution here describes the frustration of giving so much energy to a group unwilling to co-operate:⁷

For me some really big stuff comes out of it - it sounds very alarming, but at one point I thought: I need better anger management, I need some kind of anger management course. Not because I fear that I'm going to hit a participant, but because I'm spending a large amount of my personal reflection time being really angry and it doesn't go anywhere.

('Terri', GD1, UK, 24/5/2010)

Some situations within projects can set up one core value against another, and practitioners need to find a way through this conflict. For example there were several descriptions by practitioners of situations in which the principle of mutual respect was threatened by the racist behaviour of project participants. Two such incidents are recounted in the excerpts below, from much longer discussions about each cited incident:

When I came in to mount their exhibitions, a couple of them sat down either side of me, and started talking - it was so interesting - the conversation started with 'Alice, you know what? I'd rather my [child's name] were gay than married a Paki.' That was her first line. That was the intro. And it was really interesting because - how can I possibly have this conversation? Right in there! ...we had a really interesting conversation...

⁷ In Chapter 6 on the *Relational Framework* below, I refer to the toll the work can take on arts practitioners such as these, working without the supervision framework of a professionalised practice.

[Researcher] *What did your face do?*

I was really curious, I was like, following it, because I know the group well, so I wasn't shocked... I actually didn't feel emotional about it, because I know their views....

(‘Alice’, GD2.III, UK, 20/7/10)

For example there was a big racist discussion that came up with my ‘parents’ last week, where loads of racist opinions came up, and I felt like it was really important for me to hold the space, and express my own personal opinion but not challenge. And everything was fine. That wasn’t my role to say ‘it isn’t like that’...at all. And it’s the same with the children in a different way; I’m not there to judge at all.

(‘Alice’, GD1, UK, 24/5/10)

In the first case ‘Alice’s’ reaction to her own values being challenged by attitudes of project participants was one of curiosity, without surprise or emotion; and then her strategy – open conversation. In the long narrative description (not included here) that followed this excerpt she described how closely the discussion subsequently touched on her own life experience, and having to judge how much of her personal life history to disclose, in the cause of open exchange. In fact she chose to disclose a considerable amount to the two adults with whom she was in conversation – and did not in the end regret this risk. In the second excerpt ‘Alice’ describes a strategy of neutrality, and creating an arena for open discourse. These two situations were similar to several others described by practitioner respondents, in which, rather than avoid the potentially disruptive controversy, each chose to foster a non-judgemental arena for honest exchange.

Empathy

Other values implicated in the handling of complex encounters such as those described above include sensitivity (being hyper-alert to the needs of others), and what one research respondent described as ‘*a super-capacity for empathy*’ (Mary, dialogue, UK, 20/1/11). Empathy is a theme introduced earlier in relation to practitioners’ intuitive mode in this work, and although it was rarely referred to directly by practitioners in their research contributions, a capacity for some kind of empathetic identification with others is nevertheless implicit throughout the focus on the theme of humanity. Here, for example, is empathy as a cornerstone of the unwillingness to judge others:

I have absolute empathy for the situation, and go ‘there’s a reason why she felt frightened and so far out of her comfort zone.’ I don’t even need to know what it is.

(Amy, dialogue, UK, 16/12/11)

Empathy is a key element (along with ‘unconditional positive regard’) of Rogers’ concept of ‘client-centred therapy’. Rogers pinpoints a definition of empathy in the therapeutic context as follows:

To sense the client's private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the “as if” quality—this is empathy, and this seems essential to therapy. To sense the client's anger, fear, or confusion as if it were your own, yet without your own anger, fear, or confusion getting bound up in it, is the condition we are endeavoring to describe. (Rogers, 1957, p. 99)

The place or even the realistic possibility of empathy in a therapeutic context as Rogers describes it is controversial. Macnaughton (2009) discusses some of the complexities of the espousal of the idea of empathy: interrogating

the possibility of some degree of intersubjectivity between doctor and patient Macnaughton cites Buber's 'I/Thou' relationship which, according to his thinking, is only realisable between equals. The difference between the relationship of arts practitioners with project participants and the doctor-patient relationship is that the former relationships seek equality, friendship, and a shrugging off of any formal role. This approach frees arts practitioners from the limits experienced by doctors in their relationships with patients, and may open the door to a more deeply shared experience of project participants' emotional worlds.

It seems significant, however, that few practitioners used the term 'empathy' in relation to their practice, while describing experiences of sensitivity and understanding which might for others amount to the components of empathy. Arts practitioners may be wary of claiming that they can actually sense someone else's internal emotional world, as described by Rogers above, 'as if it were your own'. They may tend instead to take a route to deep understanding that is more closely allied to their first language – creativity and imagination. This route is to gain the closest insight they can, within an 'I/Thou' relationship (Buber, 1937), via their own (possibly similar) experience. Extending this insight using their imagination based on what a project participant may share with them, and informed by their acute sensitivity to moods and behaviours, they may be finding an affinity – using the package described in the previous chapter as 'intuition'. My inductive reading, and in agreement with Maxine Greene is thus that, fuelled by creative imagination, equipped with high levels of sensitivity to group dynamics and affective atmospheres, and motivated by compassion, arts practitioners are constantly attempting to find

empathetic affinity with, and thereby affirm, individual participants. As Greene suggests:

Imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. [...] It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we have called “other” (Greene, 1995, p. 3).

Any empathy within participatory arts practice certainly has as much of an opportunity as a clinician’s might have to be grounded by what Macnaughton terms ‘a momentary mirroring of that (patient’s) feeling within us’ (2009, p. 1941), and this ‘mirroring’ may offer an artist great scope for an intuitive identification of feelings.

Interpretations: The Place of Attitudes and Values in the Work

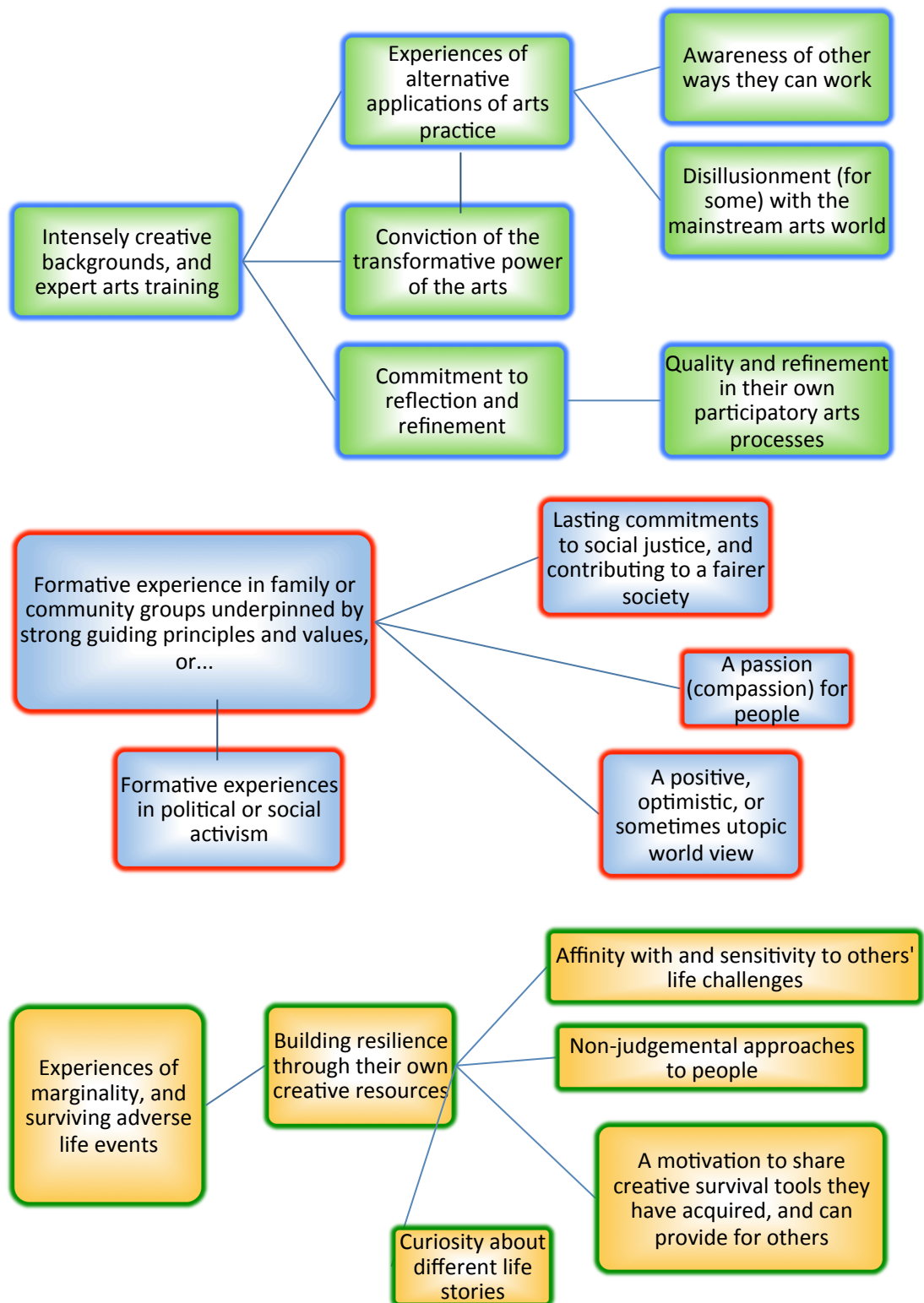
We have seen how practitioners’ values, principles and convictions are closely linked to their personal histories. Reported under three main themes, common patterns emerge including the linkages shown as flow charts in fig. 5.1 below: highly creative backgrounds leading to alternative experiences of creativity, belief in its transformative force, and commitment to quality in their work; formative involvement in activism or in groups with strong guiding values and principles, developing a strong commitment to social justice (equality, respect, honesty, inclusion), a passion for people and a highly positive attitude; and lastly experiences of marginality and adverse events, building resilience through creativity, and becoming sensitised to others’ life challenges, resulting in non-

judgemental and open attitudes towards people, and a motivation to share creative survival tools through their participatory arts projects.

Whether or not practitioners' personal history themes indicate any deeper level of similarity (as people or in terms of a character or personality profile) between the practitioners in my study is impossible to determine without significant further research. What does emerge here however, is that this is a practice strongly underpinned by the practitioners' own values; that this is a values system which though rarely discussed is widely shared; so that there is very little variance between the values and principles amongst practitioners working in very different settings and even national contexts. To understand its relevance for the practice, as an assemblage consisting of identifiable, interdependent elements, the question is whether this shared values system contributes specifically as a component of the practice assemblage, or whether it functions more as a general backdrop or flavour to the work.

A further set of findings suggests strategic intent, on the part of practitioners, to imbue the experience of participating in their workshops with the values and principles they prize. Findings suggest they develop a foundation of attitudes and values, to contribute to a conducive 'workshop ecology', as I outline, after the diagram below.

Figure 5.1: Common threads linking practitioners' personal histories to their practice



‘Modelling’ – values manifest in behaviour

The term often used by UK practitioners themselves to describe their approach to weaving particular values into the fabric of their workshops is ‘modelling’: through their behaviour and modes of interacting they hope to introduce and disseminate a way of being, which will enable the flourishing of the workshop ‘ecology’. Two examples here show this term ‘modelling’ in use, the first in relation to demonstrating the non-judgemental mode of interacting previously discussed, the second in relation to bringing a range of principles and values to life through one’s behaviour, in order to demonstrate a balance of values:

A lot of the kids I work with have very very strongly entrenched views, whether it's about Jews, or women or anything. I think it's about - if you meet them face to face and without prejudice if you like, it's about accepting them and who they are.... I suppose it all comes down to ... meeting people face to face without prejudice. And I think it's that that you're modelling, I hope.

(‘Alice’, GD2.III, UK, 19/8/10)

What you're modelling is the ability to be a person, and real, and the ability to deal with things in ways that are acceptable and respectful, and empathic and all of those things.

(Mary, GD2.III, 19/8/10)

In Mexico the same idea of building up a fabric of specific values by demonstration – leading by example – is also expressed, without the use of the term ‘modelling’ by project director ‘Alonso’:

It's about values... working together, and sharing the success: it belongs to everyone, not to one person. It's one of the things participants learn by

being here, the culture change they acquire ... They [arts practitioners] can offer an example of how to do things. For example cleaning up the workshop space, care, dedication, values, these things transmit through seeing them in action...

(‘Alonso’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

Arts practitioners’ choice to disseminate values by demonstrating them, in preference to teaching them to workshop participants directly, is in keeping with their expressed desire – already discussed – to simply ‘be themselves’ as much as possible within their work, and not to enact the separate role of a teacher:

It’s where you’re aspiring to be it, as opposed to telling people how to do it.

(Mary, GD2, UK, 19/8/10)

I don’t think I’m politically driven. But I do have clear views about things! So I guess in the way that I relate to people in the group it will be there. It’s part of me, so it will be there.

(‘Eve’, dialogue, UK, 23/1/12)

The values arts practitioners espouse, to support the workshop ecology, are essentially of them, either aspirationally or actually. Weaving these values into the fabric of the workshop by demonstration represents both a practical strategy, and another expression of practitioners’ principles, as it underlines a preference for affirmative, proactive, non-judgemental, informal shared experience, devoid of directive roles.

A community of practice?

As described in the chapter above exploring intuition within the practice, practitioners believe they are accessing their own life experiences as a major

resource for their intuitive inspiration within their practice. My broader findings therefore suggest that the commonalities in past experiences may contribute insight into why similarities are apparent in the characteristics of their practice and approach: helping to construct a commonly shared practice model. However, since this is a disparate, non-professionalised practice, never to-date conceptualised as a coherent unified whole, despite similarities in the practice that I am uncovering across a wide range of practitioners there is no perception of a 'community of practice' in Wenger's sense of the term (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger is interested in the interplay between the individual and the social, and the significance of a social formation of 'identity' to the concept of such a community. In my search to establish whether or not a coherent shared or common practice can be identified amongst the practitioners participating in my study, by investigating their individual histories I am in one respect exploring Wenger's assertion that 'there is a profound connection between identity and practice' (ibid, p149), while perhaps looking at the connection from the other end of the lens. While Wenger characterises individual (practitioner) identity as something constructed partly through negotiation with a (practitioner) community, my research respondents did not display a conscious awareness or assertion that they belonged to a practitioner community, certainly not one identified by the characteristics of their practice. Nor, as freelancers working in projects (only loosely) attached to a succession of different organisations, do they have much opportunity to interact with each other – one of the mechanisms, Wenger suggests, through which such a shared 'practitioner identity' might develop. Most – feeling that they work intuitively – seem to have the sense that they construct their own individual approach to their work, as explored in the chapter on intuition above, and have been surprised to hear of

the similarities in approach that my research is identifying, as the participant here exclaims in response to hearing others' contributions outlining their approach:

I frighteningly find that people's brains here are similar to mine! So even the tacit – the things that we're not saying here, I do understand. Whereas if I talk to a bunch of teachers, then actually it's quite difficult to relate to that.

(Lou, GD3, UK, 19/8/11)

Therefore my research suggests that identities negotiated elsewhere in practitioners' lives – for example, in their individual historical narratives (rather than in their interactions with other practitioners) – may be responsible at least in part for their intuitive responsive solutions; which in turn constitute their patterns of practice. It is the similarity in these solutions and the resulting patterns of practice that may form a community of practice here, irrespective of practitioner awareness of the existence of, or their belonging to, such a community. I will return to reflect on the implications of my study in relation to Wenger's thinking on practice and communities of practice in the concluding chapter.

Contributing to the practice assemblage

My research indicates that a specific, commonly shared system of principles and values is an intrinsic element of participatory arts practice. Practitioners, it seems, are working with these values and principles as both an underpinning foundation and a rationale for the work. But they also attempt to demonstrate them in practice, to nurture a highly principled and consistent workshop ecology, in which the creative and developmental aims of the project have a chance to

flourish. This is evidently an element of the practice assemblage constituting a significant personal investment by these practitioners into their work, and indeed their inextricable personal involvement with it, supporting an interpretation that this is a practice made of its practitioners.

To succeed in nurturing a way of being which is consistent with specific values and principles requires the cooperation of others, in order for it to become the generally recognised way things are in the workshop space. In Chapter 7 below on spatial aspects of the practice, the manifestation of a specific, co-constructed space imbued with values and principles is revisited. What the findings in this chapter help to contribute to a presentation of the practice assemblage is the following: we gain an understanding of the ways in which practitioners carry forward their own values, convictions and worldviews, developed through their personal histories and expressed in their motivations for the work, into the environments and approaches of their practice; and that they do this by demonstrating a way of being, thereby weaving into their workshops a fabric of values and principles they feel are essential for their work to be effective.

Having concluded this section discussing the role of attitudes, values, and practitioners' histories within the assemblage of participatory arts practice, I now move on to report findings on the role of relationships in the practice.

Chapter 6

A Relational Framework

The centrality of relationships

Just before I leave I see Mary saying goodbye to the Sri Lankan family in a quiet corner of the playground. They have been at the workshop throughout the whole time I've been there today, and at the parade there were mum, dad (neither with much spoken English) and three children. They've made 3 beautiful lanterns, one of them inspired by a lotus flower. The father is emotional in his goodbye to Mary – he takes photos of her with his family. He holds her hands for a long time and is tearful; Mary too. The mother hugs Mary, much shier but still very warm. 'Ali', the middle child, though he seldom speaks, smiles a stunning, open smile when around Mary. It seems they all find it hard to take their leave from each other, and from the moment. This private farewell is powerful to witness.

[Reflections added:] I find out later that night from Mary that this family is seeking asylum and has only been in the community for 6 weeks. She tells me about their conversation in the dark at the farewell I had witnessed:

I said to them tonight – “it's been nothing but a pleasure”, and I said “YOU have inspired ME by the standard of your working, because you've made beautiful, beautiful lanterns. But also because you shine as a family” – I said – “I really felt the light of your family, it's just lovely to behold!” and they got that... and it's true!

(Field notes, participant-observation at community event, UK, 4/2/12)

In this chapter I discuss findings on the relational element of community participatory arts practice, consciously and proactively pursued by arts practitioners in the workshop environment. Findings reported relate to a framework of highly positive relationships with project participants, built on care, and 'positive regard' (Rogers, 1957), an ethical approach discussed in the previous chapter. This relational element is central to practitioners' approach:

I'm an artist and I work with communities... I often say that I'm a 'people artist'... I say – I'm an artist but I can't really do anything unless I'm working with people... I'm working with bringing people together often in communities or in locations, I might say in a neighbourhood, or I might create new groups of people who come together to explore dialogue.

(Ruth, Skype, 3/4/12)

In this definition of what she does, Ruth offers a range of descriptors orbiting around a practice based in social relationships, emphatically stating the importance within the work of her connections with other people. Clearly recurrent as a theme, practitioners right across the study emphasised the importance and quality of the social relationships developed in their work. The following quotes portray other ways in which practitioners considered the relationships they develop with their project participants to be of significance:

I think the way that I communicate with the group is as important to me as my arts skills.

('Eve', dialogue, UK, 23/1/12)

Getting to know them is crucial... a big part of that is about listening to people – really listening...being in the present, just being there with those people, doing that thing at that moment in time, and that's what's important.

[Contributor emphasis indicated]

(Ali, GD5.3, UK, 3/2/12)

If you're going to become involved with a community, you're going to become properly involved. You're going to become part of them. For them to accept you, you need to become one of them. So, living with them, (I'm practically living with them - I spend all day with them) they accept me because of this. And this is important.

(‘Juan’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

These contributions are not describing communication that is incidental; it is focussed and purposeful, building individual connections of a distinct intensity, particularly seen in the final quote above from ‘Juan’, as well as in the opening vignette of Mary and the Sri Lankan family. Beyond regarding them broadly as a central feature of the work, practitioners considered social relationships a key tool in achieving the transformative aims of their projects. Findings suggest that it is the specific quality of the connections practitioners strive to build that is important, and exploring this aspect, in the following reporting, enables an understanding of their purpose and methods in their work.

Skilled practitioners indicated that, in order for this dynamic medium to support complex interchange and facilitate movement, or even transformative development, ensuring the *quality* (strength) and cultivating specific *qualities* (intricacies and attributes – such as for example the ‘*informality*’ mentioned here) of these relationships was of paramount importance:

I felt it was a very lovely, and fragile, and quite, just, budding thing that was happening, where the informality of it was just where the loveliest things were happening.

(Talya, GD1, UK, 24/5/10)

Practitioners therefore dedicated significant time and attention to the detail of these aspects of their interactions, taking place on all planes of

communication. Arts practitioners identified ‘*endless conversations going on without words*’ (Luce, GD2, UK, 19/8/10) – they were constantly communicating non-verbally, in dialogue with participants through a sensitivity to how each individual expresses themselves, accumulating gradually throughout the lifetime of a project. In the examples below, different practitioners are describing the delicacy of this contact, and their own intentions:

It’s a knowledge that’s to do with that particular relationship, which is very much to do with - kind of - feeding little positive glimmers, constantly, into them. She sees me and something in her just – a little light goes on, because she knows that I see a bit of her that makes her feel like she’s got a light shining

(‘Alice’, GD1, UK, 24/5/10 – describing the response of a very shy, quiet child, who flourishes when in contact with the arts practitioner)

It’s to do with the sensitivity of being able to connect with individual people on that level. ... it’s like having a conversation with somebody, without using words. But you are communicating; you’re conversing in a way that’s in tune with where they’re at. That’s why I’m interested in the work with autism and dementia, and all those things, because especially when people don’t have language, you depend on other ways of communicating, and you can do that.... What you’re trying to do.... is get on the same wavelength as them.

(Ali, GD5.2, UK, 3/2/12)

In my participant-observation these kinds of positive, non-verbal interactions were also clearly visible, and reciprocal. Field notes drawn from participant-observation of three community celebration projects in primary school settings describe children as:

‘impish, teasing the artists, playful’, ‘beaming at the artists’, ‘dancing, singing and laughing with an artist’, ‘giddy’. ‘Hugs and physical contact are common, natural and reciprocal’; [a child] ‘touching and stroking the artist’s arms and hands, absent-mindedly playing with her fingers and rings’. [Numerous children] ‘trying as

often as possible to be physically near to their artist'. 'Once close to an artist children seemed quiet and calm'.

(Field notes, UK, 13/7/10)

Children were observed to approach the arts practitioners *'readily and confidently'*, seeking and receiving unquestioning attention. *'Children are never ignored'*. In their encounters with children and adults alike the arts practitioners were observed as friendly, warm, *'positive'*, with a *'teasing sparkle in the eyes'* (Field notes, UK, 13/7/10). *'Body language is often very close, faces level'* (Field notes, UK, 20/1/11).

As a small child leaves the workshop Mary pokes her in the chest affectionately and smiles at her. "Bye bye gorgeous girl! Don't stay up too late!" – this last comment is addressed to the parent, conspiratorially, as they leave.

(Field notes, UK, 2/2/11)

The intensely positive, sometimes intimate nature of these contacts certainly conveyed to me, as observer, an apparent depth of trust and openness developing between arts practitioners and project participants. The ways in which such relationships grew were subtle: small gestures built upon small gestures, gradually creating a reciprocity based on trust in the authenticity of the connections between people. Field notes of participant-observation at two projects, one in the UK and one in Mexico, focus on just such small gestures in context:

Before the procession starts I'm introduced to Guillermo, who is leading one community group, taking part in the promenade performance as characters from Mexican cultural history. Guillermo is one of my artist informants. With my two companions I climb onto the roof of a small museum building above the assembling processers, passing through Guillermo's community theatre group,

who I notice are giddy with nerves, tweaking and checking each others' costumes, huddling and chattering. Guillermo moves amongst them, calm, older, saying very little but reassuring individuals with a hand on the arm and a firm, friendly glance; warm eye contact, which seems to convey confidence.

(Field notes, Mexico City, community procession for the Día de Muertos, 1/11/11)

I stop for a moment and see Mary is on hands and knees checking the proximity of candles through the hand-hole doors [in the lantern structures]. She grins through the sculpture at someone she can see on the other side through the holes.

Whenever a child walks in Mary and Gilly know them by name and Mary hails them as a celebrity entrant. She then introduces them to the others and me as 'my favourite boy', 'my chum' ... Families are welcomed with touches on shoulders, and intimate focus on their work, or their interest. ...

(Field notes, UK, community lanterns workshop, 4/2/12)

These excerpts highlight arts practitioners' proactive attention to building relationships within their project communities. Relationships are, of course, co-constructed, and without gestures and actions from project participants in response to arts practitioners' efforts, relationships would not succeed in developing. I now focus on the activity and expressions of friendship coming the other way.

Reciprocity in relationship building

In opportunistic conversations during field visits, and in organised group discussions, project participants often made reference to the feelings of attachment they develop, to friendships and to missing their contact with their arts practitioners once it is over.



Figure 6.1: *Playing together on the decks, UK, August 2012*

[Photo: Vlady Diaz]

The following examples are from a participant group discussion reflecting on relationships and interactions, and field notes of participant-observation at two community events:

[Researcher] *So how would you describe the relationship you have with them? (the artists)*

Well I would say it was a friend helping a friend. It's not 'teachery', it's not being a nurse to someone, I would say it's going up to friend and saying can you help me with this? And that friend says yes, and shows you how to do it. (B)

It's like having a friend isn't it? It's like friends... (C)

[Researcher] *So when they're not here, is that like 'a friend who's away at the moment'?*

Yeah [all 6 participants]

Yeah. You do miss them though, 'cos they're bubbly! (C)

I do, I miss 'em. (K) [...]

All children love them. When Mary walks through that door, that's it, all the children: 'Mary!!!' (B)

They all want their hugs from Mary. They all just love her! (C)

(Belinda, Carly, Kiera, Participant group discussion, UK, 16/2/11)

As people gather in small groups before leaving, two of the core team of parent lantern makers come over and report that another head teacher was here today, and wanted a parade like this for his school. 'They better not steal our Mary and Gilly though! No way!!' 'We can't do it without them! It wouldn't be the same!'

(Field notes, community lanterns event, UK, 4/2/12)

Later Mary was at the front of the parade, and a small child ('Kylie', 3 years old) was suddenly beside her, and slipped her hand into Mary's without a word. They walked together silently, in spite of 'Kylie's' auntie ('Jane', who hadn't been involved in the project) saying "come and walk with me, 'Kylie', come over here!..." Eventually 'Kylie's' gran intervened, saying to her daughter: "No Jane, she's with Mary, she wants to be with Mary".

(Field notes, community lanterns event, UK, 3/2/11)

These examples both underline the existence and positive nature of these reciprocal attachments for project participants, and raise some potentially uncomfortable questions about the prominence of arts practitioners in some people's lives. I return to this second point below, in relation to practitioners' awareness of the disruptive impact that their presence can have for some people.

As the reciprocal small gestures (such as those reported in the preceding data extracts) build a foundation, the affective relationships between

arts practitioners and project participants blossom, and can take both parties by surprise at their depth and openness. This is vividly exemplified in the field notes documenting Mary's farewell with the Sri Lankan family, which opens this chapter. Such examples show a level of emotional involvement, between arts practitioners and project participants, that seems to reach far beyond the casual, light-hearted contact which might be expected between temporary visitors to a community and local community members. Through the many descriptions above such as '*profound*'; '*really relate*'; '*touching and stroking*'; '*feeding little positive glimmers*'; '*they all just love her!*'; '*YOU have inspired ME*'; '*I do, I miss 'em*'; and so many others, my findings suggest that these contacts carry the energy of mutual inspiration and positive regard, based in familiarity and affinity – all themes explored in the previous chapter, in relation to the values of positivity, authenticity, respect and affinity, characteristic of this work. I now explore the contradictions and challenges inherent in arts practitioners building such strong affective links with project participants.

Boundaries and being bound

There is an interesting dichotomy in framing these kinds of deeply personal interactions, which are certainly powerful for those involved, as a key element of a practice that seeks to be understood as a highly skilled and ethical approach, engaging with, often, vulnerable individuals. In social or interactive professions for which training, qualifications and a professional ethics code form parameters for good practice, a key tenet, as part of a 'prescription for relationships to colleagues and clients' (Abbott, 1983, p. 856) is the establishment of professional boundaries. This concept describes an emotional

(and physical) distance which acts as a buffer between a professional and the people with whom they have contact in their professional role; a distance which is espoused as healthy for the protection both of professional practitioners and specifically of their clients or service users. Demarcating such boundaries is conceived as a conscious balancing process:

‘A worker with balanced boundaries attends to the clients’ unique needs while maintaining the key distinctions of the professional role in the relationship.’ (JC Davidson, 2007, p. 519)

However the very concept of such a professional code of conduct, in which professional roles are prominent, runs counter to what arts practitioners see as the life-blood of their practice, as outlined thus far. They prize instead intuitive responsiveness, first discussed in Chapter 4 on *Intuition*, and here framed in terms of a *relational* responsiveness, or being personally and emotionally engaged in responsive and immediate, dynamic, ‘I/thou’ (Buber, 1937) relationships with people. Some contributions suggest that arts practitioners are aware that their mode of practice might be unorthodox – even a privilege – in settings where other professionals must abide by restricting codes of practice related to their own profession framework:

I like to have the discussion – ‘how do we feel that’s gone?’ with them – ‘Because for me that was really hard work’ (etc.).... What upsets me is that teachers are told not to do that, to share how you’re feeling about something.

(‘Kay’, GD1, UK, 24/5/10)

Participatory arts practice appears to require emotional engagement in an open way in order for practitioners to access deep connections with their project participants, and thereby open up possibilities for significant experiences. As

evident in a previous quote from Luce (reported in Chapter 4 when discussing intuitive approaches and the freedom to be oneself), to retain their integrity within this work, arts practitioners find themselves, sometimes consciously but often without thinking, dancing around others' precepts of what constitutes *professional* distance. They are consciously resistant to codes of conduct that might demand of them that they separate themselves and their own responses, impulses, feelings, from their work. I will now outline examples of practitioners creating what might be seen as their own codes of practice, by working with, rather than sublimating, emotions: walking the line of emotional engagement within their relationships with project participants.

Affective attachments, and their risks

Well its difficult I think first not to get freaked out by things, because people came who had been in prison for example. But people were coming here then, who are now my friends! And at the beginning you say to yourself, OK, this is a difficult situation, tough people. But it's not their fault, it's the system. The system is bad, and so if you hear these people, and aren't afraid, and get involved with them, go to eat in their homes, they'll invite you to eat with them, stay with their families, they're friends, yeah? So, I'm friends with my students, with the people I work with. We chat like family. It's like a community, so really you become a family. [...] I changed, being here, through the process of socialising and being with people here, in this community. Now I'm a different person. I arrived here as one person, and ended up a different person. What I mean is, I used to be a worse person, and now I'm a better person. It's very significant. Because I was an arrogant person, I thought I was somebody who knew a lot, and I realised that I knew nothing, that I had so much to learn, and now I'm a different person. The moment of change was coming here, living with these people, who teach me things (I really learn from them).

(‘Juan’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

One key finding in my research – arts practitioners striving for *authenticity* in their responses to participants – has already been discussed in Chapter 5 above. Practitioners' unguarded openness in seeking to be authentically 'themselves' in their interactions sometimes led to relationships with participant groups that affected arts practitioners quite deeply on a personal level, as reported in the quote from 'Juan' above, and as previously seen with Mary and the Sri Lankan family. I have never come across an example (neither in this research nor in my years as a project evaluator) of relationships or emotional entanglements developing between arts practitioners and community participants that were regarded by anybody as violating or damaging to participants. However, the level of emotional engagement characterising creative interactions rooted in authenticity, such as these, can both provide a powerful catalytic energy, and draw deeply on the arts practitioner's own emotions, resulting in powerful impacts on them, as well as potentially on project participants.

In research dialogues arts practitioners often described becoming very involved with groups and forming bonds with individuals in projects, as 'Juan' above describes. In a UK group discussion focussing on project endings there was agreement that the end of a project could be accompanied by a bewilderment of highs – '*the walls were shaking with the energy!*' – and ensuing disorientation; '*Did I give anything? Or was I just dreaming?*' and when it's over it can feel '*like a bereavement*', '*a great sadness*' (GD: 'project endings', UK 12/5/10). The following contribution from Ruth adds some nuance to aspects of practitioners' attachments with participants:

And I change. I think the contact that I have with people, I've come to feel very, very deeply attached and connected to them as well. It's a relationship. I become part of the community of people as well. Even though there's still separation. [...] I do feel affirmed – I miss [project name] at the moment, we worked together for 5 months, I really miss that community of people...

(Ruth, Skype dialogue, 3/4/12)

Here she reflects on one possible reason for her attachment: the affirmation which being part of a community can bring. In Juan's tale above, a whole complex interrelationship process of transformation is in operation: this is the narrative of a practitioners' wholesale, open engagement with his project participants, and the resulting dramatic change in his attitudes towards people in the community, even subsequently his sense of himself in relation to them, and more broadly in the world. He considered this process – over ten years – to have been a transformative experience with a clearly positive outcome for him.

In other contributions, by contrast, arts practitioners referred to becoming aware that core relationships at the heart of the practice can be emotionally exhausting. In the first of the examples below, Mexican practitioner Guillermo discusses his decision to stop doing theatre work with homeless 'street kids', as he used to, because of the emotional damage to himself and members of his company.

I don't work with street kids these days, but yes, it was an important, significant experience for me, making theatre with them... But it was a very heavy, difficult experience. Painful, a lot of pain, the pain accumulated over time, it grew and grew, and there came a point when I said - no more, that's enough, this is unnecessary. For me and for my colleagues - because I was having to go and remove them...It's psychologically dangerous, yes ... It's absorbing, you get dragged in, they start tugging on you, they start depending on you, focussing everything completely towards you. Then you

have to be there all the time and you're saying (to yourself or your colleagues): 'No...no, no, no...don't go there! Come back, you're not meant to be there.' I had to say to a few of my team –'you can't do this any more, you mustn't do this any more!'

(Guillermo, dialogue, Mexico, 6/11/11)

In the second example a UK practitioner refers to a company realisation that they were on the cusp of a similar decision:

[Researcher] *Is there a way that you can attempt to characterise the contact and connections and interactions you have with participants?*

...[long pause]...It's a 'play fellow'; and that play then extends into something more formalised, which is 'making a play'. So that's the essential relationship I suppose.

[Researcher] *So, a 'play fellow' is a fairly core characterisation?*

Yes.

[Researcher] *What impact do these interactions we've talked about have on you?*

Well we do a lot of reflection around this – it has a massive impact. There was a stage when it was getting out of control. Because it completely stays with you. If you're in an interview situation with somebody you can remain detached maybe from the trauma that is in their lives. But when you are playing with them, then you can't [remain detached], and that really stays with you.

[Researcher] *So when you're 'playing', you're not as guarded or protected?*

Absolutely. But you've got – to combat that – the fun that you're sharing together as well. And so that essentially is hopeful....

[Researcher] *Do you have experience of being overwhelmed by it?*

Oh yes, yes. In fact it was H[evaluator] who said 'you can't go on like this', because we were in danger of saying we can't do the work any more.

[Researcher] *Do you mean you have experience of burning out?*

Yes, yes, absolutely – and it was Umm it wasn't safe. And we've been very honest about saying what effect that was, and why that happened. Despite – HUGE experience! And we still had amazing things in place, but it wasn't enough. [Contributor pauses and emphasis indicated]

(Heather, dialogue, UK, 9/9/10)

What is apparent here is the experiencing of emotional limits by two very skilled and committed arts practitioners, both of whom consider being open and emotionally involved in their interactions an intrinsic part of their practice: this will happen, it can't be avoided, it is what this is about. The first practitioner had no way of limiting the resulting damage and had to stop, while the second sought help, including instituting facilitated reflection sessions, to find ways to balance the emotional impact.

Walking the line

This aspect of the practice in which arts practitioners, in search of meaningful and dynamic connections with people, are walking the line of openness, authenticity and emotional reciprocity in relationships with project participants, demands a highly developed awareness of personal limits, and highly attuned sensitivity. These skills are implicitly as well as explicitly in evidence in participant observations, and amongst the wide range of citations from my research data reported above. They were also cited to me by senior

practitioners as key skills, and by project leaders as fundamental in what they look for in their artist teams:

So many people I work with are carrying high levels of distress – if I chose to work with that I'd be running a very different group. It would be something else. It is a fine line... It's a tightrope, but good practitioners do that really well.... It's not about sublimating it, or shoving down or shoving back, it's about judging, it's about nuance, it's about judging how much, how long to hold, to hear, to acknowledge, and when to return with the group to the task.

[Researcher] *How does group work feel to you?*

Exhausting! For me it's peak attention, to do it well is peak attention. If the delivery doesn't have that, and if the group is vulnerable, it's not good enough.

(‘Eve’, dialogue, UK, 23/1/12)

It's also basically an outlook on life. When you really are able to, and want to, see the ‘other’, to listen to them and not to impose on them, not to construct a barrier of fears and prejudices... then it can work!

(Cecilia, written responses, Mexico, Jan-March 2012)

The discussion of how to ensure that arts practitioners have adequate skills to handle the emotional aspects of their practice is an important current debate within community and participatory arts, arts and health, and the broad socially engaged arts sector. This was not a central question in my research however, because this study seeks initially to establish, through in-depth focus on the practice in action, what these necessary skills might be, as a preliminary stage to discussions about how to identify or strengthen such skills amongst practitioners. In the concluding chapter of the thesis I will discuss the implications of my findings for discussions of quality assurance and professional development within the sector.

Emotional legacy?

Arts practitioners in dialogues and group discussions sometimes talked about their complex feelings about the other side of this picture: if impacts from emotionally intense experiences were affecting them, was there ever any 'damage' to project participants? In the group discussion on 'project endings' one practitioner, Lou, referred to the responsibility she felt for some of the vulnerable members of her groups, accentuated when she reached the end of a project on which one participant seemed to have become reliant. She said she was feeling very guilty because *'someone's mental health suffered as a result of me stopping!'* and this situation was one in which she had no control and no solution (Lou, GD, project endings, UK, 12/5/10). Another practitioner talked about being aware of the capacity some projects had for catalysing radical changes in people's lives, and the fact that this sometimes left her feeling uneasy:

I remember being really aware (that) when you drop into somewhere – we would make friends, genuinely... we'd be there long enough to make connections, and people loved it, and they'd get involved, and then – you'd leave. And I know that marriages broke up. It was that intense, people were – 'Oh wow!! This is fantastic!' and then – that's it. And that's one of the reasons I really believe in being in one place, being in [town name] and wanting to do it where I live.

[Researcher] *When you say marriages broke up, do you mean people had made bonds that were stronger than was appropriate for a temporary time? That they fell in love with each other?*

I don't think it was even that, it was more – 'Oh this is fantastic, I want to join the circus!' and changed their lives as a result, and actually it wasn't

like that really. You think it's amazing, so you join the circus as it were, and you leave your existing life, and think this is absolutely the answer, and then discover actually it's not. It really bothered me; it really bothered me being one of those people.

(Ali, dialogue, UK, 11/2/11)

This aspect of the work – arts practitioners feeling that they carried some responsibility for the bigger narrative curves of project participants' lives, beyond the scope of the project itself – clearly constituted an unresolved burden of the work for some respondents, as shown in the excerpts above. However for others (as was highlighted previously with regard to practitioners' motivations in this work) it was one source of their inspiration to continue. In the excerpt immediately below, Guillermo explains his different handling of the issue of responsibility:

With the women, there's a woman who's now decided to separate from her husband: 'I'm going with my kids to stay with my mum, because I'm not putting up with it any more.' - she doesn't enjoy her life any more. It's perhaps through this - these stories - that each participant comes to take on where they're at in their life. ...You haven't told her to leave him; no she's the one who takes the decision. When this woman tells me about leaving, it gives me a real sense of satisfaction. I don't feel responsible. Because she's the one who has made the decision. I didn't tell her - 'leave him!'.

(Guillermo, dialogue, Mexico, 6/11/11)

He expresses here his faith that the drama process he facilitates, based on people working with their own life stories, ensures that participants make their own choices and decisions, leaving him feeling comfortable with his contribution to any transformative outcomes from the work. Others, however, were more critically reflective. Here 'Eve' uses an example to discuss the balance of risk in pushing things too far:

Unusually, we came in saying – ‘this is about stigma, this is about mental health, and it’s about your take on it’, knowing that everybody in the room had lived with that, and experienced hideousness around it. So it was hugely sensitive (in terms of that whole safety issue) – and mainly it was absolutely brilliant, mainly people produced remarkably brave, challenging work that was a gift to the viewer; and then there were a couple of people that really struggled, saying ‘I come here to not think! I come here to not have to consider this, I don’t want to talk about this!’ So I had to talk to them and say ‘don’t worry, that’s all right’.... That’s something - if we did it again I would do more preparation with the groups about it, and say really clearly at the beginning – you don’t have to do this. People pushed themselves – they chose their content, we didn’t say this has to be heavy duty. But one person came in with the mental health act and started cutting it all to pieces! Someone else was bringing in photographs of herself, cutting those out and putting real hair on them, putting bars over them – absolutely remarkable, and really got loads out of doing it. But again it’s about that checking and double-checking that everybody’s all right: and everybody’s all right when they leave the room at the end of each session ...

(‘Eve’, dialogue, UK, 23/1/12)

This practitioner places her faith in the safety provided by highly developed facilitation skills and a sound process. Her contribution highlights here two very important aspects of this process that she believes provide, for her practice, a safety net to minimise the risk of a damaging emotional legacy resulting from the work. Firstly she alludes to her own reflexive process, a state which consumes all highly skilled practitioners following the delivery of every session, in which doubts and concerns often result in decisions to adjust or retune their practice for the future. Secondly she refers to the importance of remaining highly attuned to participants’ comfort or discomfort with the process, even until they leave the room and beyond. However the reverse side of the same coin here is the inevitable fact that not all participatory arts and arts and

health practitioners can demonstrate either the acute sensitivity she describes here, or the willingness and ability to reflect critically. The challenge of quality assurance in an unregulated field of practice, alluded to in the previous subsection '*Walking the line*', arises again here, and demands discussion – which I will turn to in the concluding chapter of the thesis, focussing on the implications arising from my research findings.

Overall the burden of responsibility practitioners feel for initiating or catalysing risky changes for project participants is clearly counterbalanced on a personal level by the overwhelming majority of positive relationship experiences, and by the numerous positive outcome narratives they both witness and hear reported to them. Where practitioners spoke about their awareness of a negative emotional impact on them as practitioners, they also highlighted the importance (as a quasi-professional imperative) of seeking external support. As seen in the discussion of 'burn-out' quoted earlier, this includes asking specialists to advise them, or organising professional supervision in order to maintain their own emotional health, and sustain their ability to deal with the intensity of their work.

So far in this chapter, in focussing on the prominence of relationship building as an aspect of participatory arts practice, and on the depth and positive nature of the relationships that practitioners strive to construct, I have also illuminated the contradictions and challenges for arts practitioners inherent in building such strong affective links with project participants. The emotional cost to some practitioners of choosing to work outside the protection of a professional framework, and the ways in which this can sometimes result in the so-called

'burn-out', constitute the more messy edges of an intuitive or responsive approach to practice with community groups. They emphasise the need to develop discourses on this practice that problematize issues that remain points of vulnerability – particularly in relation to awareness and integrity in attachments. Discussing the relational framework as a route to ensuring positive emotional attachments in every project would be useful, where practitioners lack experience or contact with their peers, and reflexivity amongst some may be under-developed.

Interpreting the Positive Relational Framework

Participatory arts practitioners' common drive to build high quality relationships with project participants, a foundational element of their practice, comes from the belief that only within a positive relational framework can other aspects of the practice be effective. The positive relational framework consciously prioritised and striven for by arts practitioners in this work seems not only to offer positive experiences for those involved in projects, as exemplified in the quotes in the early part of this chapter, from participants and in the field notes from participant observation. My analysis of these findings suggests that this relational framework also functions as a proactive medium through which other things can take place.

The positive relational framework forms an arena for learning and exploration, for example the ways in which project participants and arts

practitioners alike are described by research contributors above as learning from each other – *‘learning on both sides’*, and how mutual curiosity is both fuelled and satisfied through the relationships, allowing greater insight into other people’s realities and life experiences – as specified above in relation to ‘Juan’s’ own journey of change.

The relationships fostered can frame new experiences for people (participants and practitioners alike) in ways that enable them to accept the new and the strange, because they are accompanied in these encounters by someone they consider a *‘friend’*. These relationships can thereby enable people to overcome fears of, or barriers to, different ways of understanding other people and experiences. This can be understood when recalling once again the Sri Lankan family, able to take a full part in, and obviously enjoy, a community lanterns event, in a community very new to them; supported by their strong attachment to arts practitioner Mary.

The relational framework offers project participants unfaltering affirmation (discussed in the previous chapter), and the confidence invested in them by arts practitioners that allows them to accept personal challenges, for example having the confidence to play a historical character for the first time in the Mexican processional performance, or to challenge and stretch themselves beyond their own expectations creatively and expressively – producing *‘remarkably brave, challenging work that was a gift to the viewer’*.

The framework offers opportunities for productive reflexivity, for example practitioners trusting project participants to offer them authentic feedback about the creative experiences they are providing, and participants able to feel emotionally safe enough to reflect on and reassess their own lives and decisions, sometimes resulting in radical changes in perspective and in life

direction – for example the woman in the drama project leaving a violent partner. Whilst acknowledging that practitioners may require further opportunities to reflect on strategies to ensure that their developing attachments with project participants are secure, functioning as a positive catalyst without costing either party unnecessary emotional distress, this study establishes the relational framework as a key element of the practice. I now move on to explore the third qualitative framework prioritised and co-constructed by participatory arts practitioners: the *spatial framework*.

Chapter 7

A Spatial Framework

The centrality of space

Without any prompt, when asked about the objectives of 'La Central Del Pueblo' he said: 'If we're talking hospitals, we are like the emergency room'. He described a project which is about transforming space – both on a small and a grand scale – creating a space here, but also affecting the city, attempting to impact on the space 'of the city we love'. He said that if there were thousands of Central Del Pueblos he believes the city would be healthy and not be suffering.

(Field notes, dialogue with Benjamín, Mexico City, 15/11/11)

In this chapter I report on the importance to participatory arts practitioners of developing a bounded space in which to work, where people feel both safely supported, and adequately challenged, in order to stretch themselves in new ways. Alongside the framework of values and principles (Chapter 5) and the relational framework (Chapter 6), this chapter's findings constitute a third qualitative framework for the practice: the *spatial* framework.

Thinking about and working with spaces and environments is a recurrent preoccupation of practitioners. Constructing a space of a specific type suitable for fostering particular outcomes was commonly considered a fundamental

purpose of the work, even to the extent of practitioners initially articulating their work as artists in terms of a spatial practice. The notes quoted at the opening of this chapter for example, from an impromptu discussion with the director of a grass-roots community based arts project, in the heart of Mexico City's dilapidated historical centre, describe a project vision in which 'space' is seen as the aspect around which everything else orbits. For other practitioners, particularly acutely expressed by those working in Mexico but also indicated by UK artists, the actual provision or creation of a space as a refuge was considered a fundamental right for disenfranchised or marginalised groups:

I think that for women in Mexico it's very important to have a voice and to be heard [...] fighting for these spaces for a multiplicity of voices to be heard I think is crucial. Many women are entirely erased, and have no voice, and are absolutely powerless. And when you work with women and you produce these pieces where you can all tell your story something very amazing happens.

(‘Liliana’, dialogue, Mexico, 14/11/11)

This area is very marginalised, ‘Neza’ - it's a place with very few resources, a place of poverty, deprivation; and also there is very little culture here So this is a really, really important space, where there's so much creativity...

(‘Maria’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

Creating a spatial framework

Practitioners' references to spatial ideas, when discussing their work, fell largely into three categories, descriptive of 'space' on three different levels. Firstly, on the literal level, practitioners referred to the importance of the physical space in which their work takes place – the room or environment in which people meet

to take part in creative activities with them. Respondents detailed how they prepare this space appropriately for their work, and how they manage people and activities within this physical space. For the purposes of this thesis, this spatial aspect is referred to as the *physical environment* of the work.

A significant element of the work, already discussed from different angles in previous chapters, takes place in the field of human interactions, and a collective, affective group dynamic, which was also often referred to by practitioners as ‘the space’, as seen here:

There is something about ‘the space’ – not just the real, physical, art room space, but there’s something about (the fact) that people recognise how you’re going to operate with them...they learn to understand that.

(Mary, GD1, UK, 24/5/10)

This second spatial concept has a temporal dimension, since this ‘space’ usually refers to what might be understood as the atmosphere or the metaphorical ‘space’ between people, or else as the general affective quality of the ‘space’ within the physical environment, at a given moment. Practitioners described their sensitivity to and responsibility for influencing, or seeking to manage, atmospheres and dynamics in this dimension as a prominent aspect of their practice: being a ‘*holder of space*’ (Ruth, Skype, 3/4/12). Drawing on Anderson’s exploration of ‘affective atmospheres’ (2009), this ever shifting temporal-spatial aspect will be referred to here as the *dynamic affective atmosphere* of the workshop.

Thirdly, some practitioners in my study used another metaphorical concept of ‘space’, referring occasionally to an individual’s internal environment of the emotions, but more often to the internal world of the creative imagination,

as described by Heather below, which clearly distinguishes this spatial concept from those outlined already:

That space (where creativity happens) isn't just confined to the space and time that we're here, together. That space goes on and on and on – it's always there. And it always comes to you...

(Heather, dialogue, UK, 9/9/10)

This is a 'space' or place where, notionally, each individual's ideas take shape, or where they might dream, or create fantasy worlds, and was most often referred to by practitioners who talk about 'play', or about 'vision' as key features of their work. This third and most hidden spatial dimension will be referred to here as the *environment of the creative imagination*.

Each of these spatial aspects of the practice will now be explored in the light of their contribution to a multidimensional *spatial framework*, which practitioners were found to co-construct with participants, and which they prioritised in their research contributions as fundamental to the effectiveness of their work.

Physical environments

Exploring the different ways in which practitioners use and modify space, I begin with the nature and organisation of the physical project environment. Every physical environment used by participatory arts practitioners in their work is unique, and those observed during my field work varied from outdoor fields and gardens to church halls, from school classrooms to an art gallery, from purpose-built arts centres to squatted buildings, from the streets of a local community housing estate to a maximum security prison. With this variety it is impossible

to present a typical picture of a participatory arts physical environment, however the following vignette, from field notes depicting a workshop scene, includes many hallmarks that would resonate as familiar to numerous practitioners and project participants. These hallmarks are highlighted in the deconstruction, which follows the excerpt.

12:35pm

As I enter, in the hall (home of the lantern workshops over the 2 weeks) the atmosphere is quiet and industrious, calm and productive. Radio on in the background, each table is festooned with half-covered structures and glue bowls, sponges, tissue paper. Most people in here are wearing black bin liners, with holes cut in the top and sides for protruding heads and arms, and most by now quite bedraggled and torn. They're like an unorthodox style of team uniform. Everyone greets incomers here: T.... (parent) waves me towards the bin liners and asks 'where have you been?!' I explain that I've been very busy, but couldn't miss the last push... This is accepted. She just says 'there's loads to do!'; Jobs are handed out in a relaxed and easy way. Roles vary. There are:

Lantern structure coverers (pasting stretches of pre-cut tissue with PVA glue on the table top using a large cube of sponge, carefully picking each soggy sheet up by 2 corners, carrying it, hanging, to the lantern and draping it across an uncovered stretch of withy structure);

Repairers ('fettling' as it's known – checking structure joints for strength and adding more masking tape where needed, then inspecting the structure for overall stability, and the positioning of the candle holders – bespoke dishes made of whiskey bottle caps wired into position – and finally checking covered lanterns for gaps, tears, over-baggyiness, or the lack of a chimney to let out the heat and candle smoke);

Door cutters (creating, by gentle poking into the taught tissue, the small, hand-sized opening in the lantern tissue structure, that will allow a hand with a lighter or taper to reach in and light the candle inside when the time comes);

And door makers (pasting a small square of tissue that will hang over the opening as a door flap, wrapping into the bottom side of the flap a thin stretch of withy to act as both a weight to keep the door flap closed, and a handle to lift the door flap with, and attaching the flap to the lantern above the door opening).

People are keen to show me their beautiful and complex sculptures – the dinosaur, the Harry Potter figure, the ‘remembrance star’ – all designed free-hand...

The low level chat in the room is constant. There’s much teasing. The two arts practitioners shout out broad instructions such as ‘let’s get this floor clear folks!’...

Everyone is calm as the (parade) deadline approaches and the traffic in the room starts to quieten down. Then just before the final 2-hour countdown (at 3:30, the end of school day) stray children drift in, to look at the progress and to find their own lantern, seemingly drawn to this space as moths to a light. Parents come dragged in by children, and stand for a few minutes, grinning shyly at the scene (as if blinking in the sunlight after emerging from an underground tunnel). Every entrant is welcomed. The adults in the lanterns team seem accustomed to the span of tasks towards zero hour, and they continue undistracted.

(Field notes, participant-observation, UK, 4/2/12)

Several observations mark out the scene described above as a physical (including sensory) environment deliberately constructed to maximise the effectiveness of the project; and indeed as one that shared characteristics with several other observation sites in my study. These characteristics are now explained, as common hallmarks of the physical environment of a participatory arts project.

A familiar space transformed: the ‘hall’ is in this case a primary school hall, commandeered for the duration of the project, which means the room itself has undergone a complete transformation of use and appearance, yet it is easily accessed by members of the school community and is within familiar surroundings;

Homely informality: having the radio on in the background is the arts practitioners’ choice, ensuring that this space is differentiated from other school spaces, and is perhaps more similar to a home environment, or a shed or

manual labour workshop. The pop music played on the radio station regularly instigates collective singing of favourite songs by many in the room;

Clutter and detritus of industrious activity: the fact that tables are 'festooned' with the accoutrements of the making activity demonstrates an informal (untidy) space, which is industrious and productive;

Playful and pragmatic adaptation of cheap materials: The use of black bin liners as aprons is both pragmatic (to keep whole bodies of all sizes glue-free, as cheaply as possible) and deliberately levelling – everyone from senior teacher or arts facilitator to 4 year old child wears the bin liner, also as a mark of belonging to the space and the team. They lend the team a slightly bedraggled, possibly subversive, certainly unpretentious character, which cannot be perceived as exclusive or intimidating, and they seem to make people cheerful with 'silliness';

The obvious and assertive acceptance of the mess: the re-designation of school tables as glue-covered pasting stations confirms that mess is expected and should not cause concern;

Non-experts are welcome: Using reclaimed ordinary materials such as car sponges, bottle-tops, wire and masking tape means being surrounded by familiar household paraphernalia, and communicates the unquestioned inclusion of non-experts;

Valuing completed work: The fact the room houses not only activity but also completed work offers on-going inspiration and encouragement, as well as the opportunity for intermittent celebration and affirmation of creative achievements. Participants' appetite for opportunities to feel proud of their work is demonstrated by their readiness to show newcomers such as myself their finished lanterns;

Chat. The constant ‘low level chat’ in the room signifies that on-going communication between community members is the norm, and integral to the concentrated activity;

Welcoming workspace. The observations relating to the ‘traffic in the room’ are significant in showing that this is an open space, where people come in and out all the time, and that this is expected and welcomed (including ‘every entrant’), without the efficiency of the workshop suffering;

Cheerful teamwork. Finally the descriptive note on passer-by visitors – ‘parents dragged in by children’, and observations of their reaction on entering the space, holds a mirror up to the scene in the physical environment of the project. This appears to be experienced by visitors as a place apart, transformed and unexpected, light in atmosphere, as magnetic and as welcoming as warm sunshine.

The ten characteristic features outlined here – which, while certainly not universal or exhaustive, are still typical – are transferable hallmarks of the physical environment of much community-based participatory arts work involving ‘making’, with some also shared by projects involving other art form approaches. These themes are echoed in other projects and by other practitioners in my study. The photographs below explore some such echoes, using a visual analysis.

While exploring the open-air space of the community cultural project ‘El Faro de Oriente’ on the outskirts of Mexico City I came across this fascinating little sculpture carved from a single breezeblock (fig 7.1), now lying discarded on a stretch of waste grass. It had apparently been created to capture the essence of a typical ‘Faro’ workshop scene, since it was certainly characteristic

of the physical workshop environments I was visiting as participant observer there.



Figure 7.1: Discovering a sculpture



Figure 7.2: Breezeblock sculpture detail

Of immediate interest, particularly with respect to the international comparison in my research, are the ways in which this tender depiction of a Mexican arts workshop scene (fig 7.2) echoed several of the hallmarks highlighted in the UK

community arts project participant-observation above. Despite being a miniaturised and rough-hewn work, it is possible to see details such as the ghetto blaster perched precariously on a platform on the left, a waste bin or dustbin on the right, a bottle and some other vague detritus picked out at the foot of the rough work bench, and even some finished work – pictures – displayed across the arch in the wall.

The three images that follow show a reclaimed derelict space, currently run as a thriving community arts hub in the neglected and disadvantaged northern corner of Mexico City's historical centre. The former convent building is a daily hive of activity, with numerous workshops filling every available corner. On the balcony above, the local neighbours (families living as tenants in the tiny, dark rooms) hang out rugs over the railings. This kind of physical environment for the work exemplifies a characteristic determination to create possibilities for working together in whatever spaces can be found, and what Benjamín above described as '*transforming spaces*' in order to transform perspectives on what is possible within a community.



Figure 7.3: Two shots of the ancient internal Central Del Pueblo courtyard



Figure 7.4: The entrance to La Central Del Pueblo, direct from the street

Back in the UK a break-dancer transforms a dilapidated prefab hut beside a Victorian urban church twice a week into a hub of creative activity, by allowing his workshop group to share the room with his professional colleagues, while they warm up and work out sophisticated dance moves. The mixture of professionals and an informal community workshop I observed taking place in the same physical environment lent some gravitas to the efforts of the inspired young workshop participants, and created an environment marked by its dynamic energy and focus, despite its housing in this humble and rough prefab hut:

The children sometimes turn to watch, but mostly take the parallel session in their stride. It strikes me that these are powerful role models for the skinny little kids working with 'Lance'. When they finish, 'Lance' gets them to watch 'Marty' do some spectacular spinning. Wowed, they clap him spontaneously, wide-eyed and silent.

(Field notes, UK, 24/5/12)

In other observed projects the practitioners made efforts to create a physical environment that was as informal and homely as possible, including sometimes enabling the group to cook and eat together. The following two brief citations are from participant-observation:

The workshop environment created by Amy and Chrissie is incredibly low-key; just going about things gradually, almost like sharing each other's living space.

(Field notes, UK, 7/2/12)

Tony is sitting with a cup of tea, and when I come in he says 'we're just talking about arts practice!' cheerfully. The pace of the session is extraordinarily leisurely; people gather slowly and the first 'ritual' is to be made a cup of tea... The session gently continues, with chat about the usefulness of ironing clothes,

how many countries and places Alan has visited with the Scouts, and other subjects back and forth. More tea is made at one point: 'The most important thing!' says Tony. The atmosphere feels very safe and cheerful, with no jars...

(Field notes, UK, 20/7/12)

One practitioner in my study spoke in a group discussion about needing to be in the workshop environment an hour in advance of the session, in order to set up the physical environment in the right way for the group. Even if working with children, when she wants to allow the session to unfold following the group's impetus *'so that they've got ownership of the space right from the very beginning'* (Lou, GD4, UK, 11.10.11), this still requires pre-planning in the space. It was very interesting then to observe the same practitioner in a later workshop session, dealing with the loss of this advance preparation time in the physical workshop environment:

Meanwhile, Lou is flustered. She hasn't been able to get into the room to set up the workshop space. This is really exasperating for her, and she is really stressed. She manages to lay out a range of activities, which she calls 'chaos, complete chaos!', but the families sit quite happily and calmly in the space, with their sketchbooks, adding collages, drawing, sticking in photos they've selected to remember the project. They're quite happy.

[She tells me later she had all these plans for how the last session would be, and couldn't set any of them up. She says she feels she's had 'the treasures of the final session stolen! (or the group has)'. This is a theft she doesn't recover from, even after the session is over.]

(Field notes, UK, 17/7/12)

Finally, there are some art forms that explicitly rely on working with and transforming the physical environment of the workshop. Theatre practitioner Cecilia told me the story of a prison project she had run in Mexico which

involved extreme measures to achieve the necessary transformation of the physical space:

Once (making theatre in a prison) we blacked out a whole shed where there had been a sewing workshop, the roof was covered with enormous skylights that had been essential for the sewing work inside. Basically it was madness to even try it, and most of the inmates in the prison had to smile at the idea. When we finally managed it, using cardboard, newspaper, and above all the blankets that they used at night to keep themselves warm in the freezing winter weather (it was winter when we did it), nobody had any doubts about it, everyone was totally committed. They did it with passion and despite the risks: every performance demanded a complete security operation to get onto the roof and cover it – it became their life; each time the whole prison section gave up their blankets. Sometimes they got soaked in the rain; and then they went back to bed with damp bedding. There was never a single dissenting voice.

(Cecilia, email responses from Mexico, January-March 2012)

A UK-based theatre practitioner also explained the centrality of working with and managing the physical workshop environment, and how this incorporated or interrelated with the management of ‘atmospheres’:

[Researcher] *Do you have a deliberate set of thoughts, practice or ideas in relation to the physical space?*

Yes - being theatre practitioners we're incredibly spatially aware, and aware of atmospheres [...] and that's informed by 'making theatre'. The way that we work is informed by focusing on the body and the space, and how everyone relates to everyone else; and we need to make sure conditions are right for that. When you're making theatre you're constantly managing space. And I think in a way that's quite comforting for the participants because they kind of know where they are, and feel safe.

(Heather, dialogue, UK, 9/9/10)

Focussing here on findings relating to the physical environment of the practice, it is evident that the physical environment of a project is often carefully constructed, sometimes in collaboration with participants but guided by the specialist knowledge and skills of the arts practitioners. Observations have also indicated how practitioners can feel displaced if they cannot give due attention to this aspect of their delivery. I now turn to findings relating to the second spatial dimension.

The dynamic affective atmosphere

Managing the metaphorical ‘space’ – the ever-changing dimension of group dynamics – is an aspect of the practice in which (as explored in Chapter 6 above) skilled practitioners excel. A project participant explained that the practitioners –

‘have a way of making every single person who walks through the door feel important. They do. They have a way of just making everybody feel nice.’

(Belinda, Participants’ Group Discussion, UK, 16/2/11).

A further exchange then expanded on the interplay between what the practitioners bring and the ensuing mood or *dynamic affective atmosphere* of the project space:

It’s the way they come across to everybody isn’t it, they’ve got that... aura.
(C)

Believe me, in that room, right, it’s not just Mary and Gilly, it’s every single person in that room – believe me, their auras are out here!
[Indicates wide]... because when you’re happy your aura grows. When

you're sad, and you're down, and you're in [indicates bowed shoulders], your aura shrinks in. (B)

(Carly, Belinda, Participants' Group Discussion, ibid)

Practitioners spoke of their conscious goals with the affective atmosphere: towards creating an *'environment in which people can flourish'* (Ali, GD5, UK), such as described below by 'Maria'. 'Eve's' contribution links space, mood, and self-esteem, and both 'Eve' and 'Maria' offer here examples of the specific clear strategies for how to develop the kind of affective atmosphere that can facilitate or catalyse positive change:

This is a very open place, ok, where nothing is bad, nothing is good, nothing is ugly or beautiful, ... there's a lot of respect. I think that in general, I make it like that in my workshops.

('Maria', dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

Supporting people to stand back from themselves in what they have made ... and think – 'that's beautiful and I did that.' And also to think: 'this is a privileged space, a beautiful environment, and that's part of me.' And for people who are a bit lost, or confused, that's a great thing.

('Eve', dialogue, UK, 23/1/12)

Contributors recounted subtle changes they were observing amongst their workshop participants, and reflected on why such changes were happening. As exemplified in the words of 'Alice' here:

...Because of what happens in the group, that part of her, which is there all the time, can be allowed to just kind of go – 'hhh!' [opening gesture] – this is who I am here, and this is what happens and it feels like a good place to be. [lots of agreement]

('Alice', GD1, UK, 24/5/10)

Hence, practitioners were explicitly aware of the dynamic affective environment of their work. They saw managing this spatial dimension as an important aspect of their practice, and that the nature of the affective atmosphere they were seeking to create could be a key factor for nurturing changes – even subtle new openings, such as Alice describes.

The environment of the creative imagination

The third spatial dimension evidently accessed through practitioners' spatial practices was the internal environment of the imagination.



Figure 7.5: Lou creating an imaginative 'monsters' space with children, families project.

Although a private and individual world (described in Chapter 5, in relation to shyness, as a place of retreat when the real world is too frightening), arts practitioners sometimes referred to this as a 'space', which, through this work, is activated and can be collectively shared between individuals. This idea is most common amongst practitioners who talk about 'play' as a key feature of their work. It is also the currency in the accounts of respondents who talk about people's 'vision' as a concept to describe imagining possible futures, or for example the imagination of potential life-paths, to which I return following the focus here on 'play'.

Fun and playfulness are commonly cited features in creative work with groups. However some practitioners in my study discuss working more directly through play itself as an environment:

So especially if you're creating ideas, and stories and things it's not something that's confined to a particular time or a particular workshop. It's not in the room at all, and they take away that. ... I haven't thought about what they take away actually, and how often they think about it – but I know that I'm constantly thinking about it, and suddenly an idea will pop into my head...

[Researcher] *You're talking about the space beyond the room. But also when you're in the room, the 'space' that you're creating for the ideas is also not confined to the room is it?*

No, absolutely not, because the imagination, imagination can take you anywhere – anywhere! There's an escape: It happens when you're playing... quite often my role often ends up being leading people out of that space; because they're so in that space they certainly can't say 'ok let's finish' – they can't even hear me say 'ok let's finish up now.' Because they're somewhere else.

(Heather, dialogue, UK, 9/9/10)

This fascinating quote indicates an experience perhaps similar to Alice in Wonderland's rabbit hole (Carroll, 1865) – a place participants in a workshop can slip into, where other norms, such as 'nonsense' (discussed later), govern realities. Here Heather, among other practitioners, is directly using the 'play' mode, which is considered by theorists including Huizinga (1970 [1944]) and Winnicott (1968) to be an other state of consciousness, or a 'liminal' (Turner, 1979, 1982) or 'transition' (Winnicott, 1971) space. The use of 'play' in this work will be further explored in Chapters 8 and 9, where its potency as a device of creativity is discussed, and its character as a liminal, ritual territory is explored (Turner, 1979, 1982).

The other group of practitioners in my sample who referred to working directly with the environment of the creative imagination in their practice were those who focus on developing individual or collective visions for the future. In an excerpt from Ruth's dialogue, quoted in Chapter 5, discussing ideal values, she developed this idea, explaining that she works by encouraging participants' visions for the future – their 'micro-utopias' – to be collectively rehearsed. In order for them to do this she hopes to use her creative expertise, rooted in performance but extending to a range of other art forms, to create an 'other' space, between realities. Another practitioner – 'Maria' – describes guiding workshop participants into the environment of the creative imagination using music and relaxation, after which she will work with them using movement inspired by the images they found there. In these ways a place apart (the imagination) is used to release participants from the here and now, to envision other possible realities. I now turn to considering how the different spatial

aspects discussed so far combine to create a specific *project space*, and how this might be distinguished from the world beyond.

Making a Space Apart

Building spatial-temporal boundaries using ritual

Amongst practitioners in my study, a particular theme was common in their attention to the details of spatial properties and qualities, in order to arrive at the desired 'space' for their work. This was the importance of marking out the project space as something and somewhere distinctive, special, or different from the everyday. Creating a sense of a space or *place*, of a kind not necessarily dependent on physical boundaries (walls of the room, a designated area), as for example in outdoor work or work that moves from place to place, but which is nevertheless separate and distinguishable from what is beyond it, required practitioners' considered attention. Some of the building blocks they used, in the construction of the kinds of separate or special project spaces they felt were needed, are now considered.

Practitioners mostly spoke about starting their participatory workshops using specific entry activities, including welcome games, focussed circles to plan what will take place, and physical games to facilitate communication or relaxation. Numerous examples were seen and cited, the style of activity dependent on the art form and group, as well as the idiosyncrasies of the arts practitioners. These were effective as warm-up activities and for allowing practitioners to introduce themselves; but they also acted as markers of the beginning of the active space (Atkinson & Robson, 2012). As also noted by

Atkinson and Robson, when the same activity is always used to introduce a session this can be experienced as a kind of ritual, which separates the group members from whatever was before their arrival here – it facilitates a disconnection with before, and a connection with here and now, and with the arts practitioners and each other. The use of rituals in this way has resonances with ideas on liminal spaces, first articulated by van Gennep (1960), and further theorised at length by Turner (Turner, 1969, 1974, 1979, 2002). The excerpt below highlights a practitioner considering an appropriate entry ritual, as well as the importance of inclusion and acknowledgement of individuals:

For a group I run for people with dementia it's really important that I'm able to have their work on the table, and give them back what they have said in various ways. As a way of re-entering the process, so that's about giving a connecting-joining bridge, anchoring thing, which again I think feeds safety, and feeds place. And people will know then that they've been seen and heard too.

(‘Eve’, dialogue, UK, 23/1/12)

Often cups of tea, or food sharing were used as a gentle opening ritual. This was particularly noticeable where people from different cultures or with different languages were coming together for a project. As well as opening rituals most practitioners also used closing rituals, which some designated as opportunities for reflection, or feedback on the project experience:

‘We have a ‘closing’ as I call it, where we can discuss and talk about how we feel, what has happened in the session’

(‘Maria’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

The importance of closure of a session was highlighted by some practitioners acknowledging disappointment or even a sense of failure if they missed this

opportunity or were deprived of it: being reduced to saying goodbye outside the space in the corridor for example. Lou (pictured in fig 7.5 above) introduced a small closing ritual for the end of each session with mothers and pre-school children:

The whole group gathers round a metal fish sculpture, standing on its tail in a glass case in the entrance hall to the gallery. This is something they do every week, and it's a fitting farewell: if you put a coin in the slot, the metal fish opens to reveal a small figure of a boy, who mechanically bows, stiffly, and then the fish closes up again. The moment is so small, but the children love it. Child after child puts their coin in and the whole group watches as the fish opens to reveal the figure, the children all bow stiffly with the miniature boy, and the fish closes again. Apparently I'm told that even last week when the children didn't attend, the parents gathered round to do the fish ritual. This is very interesting. It seems to have become part of the leaving ceremony, through which they close this experience and keep it safe.

(Field notes, UK, 17/7/12)

The excerpt here from participant observation describes the ritual on the final week of the project – a potentially heightened moment of closure. The week in which parents still spontaneously ran the child-centred ritual at the close of the session, despite no children being present, shows how this ritual had gathered increasing significance as integral to their workshop experience.

If, as reported here, practitioners appear to use mini rituals to help demarcate the temporal and spatial boundaries of the project space, they are also highly active in moulding the space within these boundaries. I now focus on the qualitative texture of the spaces they are working to build, and some of the strategies they use to do this.

A different kind of space

There are specific and distinctive qualities of project spaces, which according to my study can be seen as typical of participatory arts projects, occurring throughout my field research. These qualities constitute the manifestation of the framework of values, explored in Chapter 5, which all practitioners described as key to their practice. The resulting qualitative atmosphere of this typical project space is characterised by the following description, presented as a composite of verbatim quotes relating to this theme, drawn from a range practitioners' research dialogues, including some from Mexico and some from the UK:

The first thing, as a chronology, is that people will feel welcomed into the space, and because I often deal with people who are quite vulnerable, that is key: [the sense that] 'here, nobody is judging me'. We're making a space that feels good, open, receptive, supporting, in which people can be themselves, and express, whatever they need to. I think it's essential that people have control, are in control over what happens to them and what they engage in.

Something happens, taking these very small steps, which feel HUGE... and you've got to take this risk to do this tiny thing! We've got to give a kind of environment where you can do that, which of course means being affirmative, whatever anyone does... It's important that we create an atmosphere that is supportive, 'fraternal', and not rigid. There's an ambiance here – you breathe it, you see it here, it's free....

Yet I'm very clear that I'm there to support people to make the artwork; to create a safe space in which to become absorbed in that activity and to take pleasure from it. In the end, it's about creating a space which is different perhaps from others they know. For example – here, it's magical. This space – 'El Faro' – is magical. All around, there's an energy I believe... you can sense it.

(Composite description, field notes, drawn from verbatim data)

Most practitioners described working deliberately, using any strategy they know or can dream up, functioning often in their *intuitive mode*, as explored in detail in

Chapter 4, to mould the project space and achieve the qualities outlined here. Some described strategies to achieve specific qualities:

The other thing that for me is very important is consistency, being consistent. ... It's a consistency of how you are...

(Mary, GD2.3, UK, 20/7/10)

Some practitioners pinpointed as important facilitating the creative process in a way that demonstrated the control participants had over what they made:

(It's) Absolutely got to be authentic. And I have no trouble with that... And I think – especially vulnerable children because of the professionals that they encounter – quite often they're met with a lack of authenticity in their lives, so they are very excited by authenticity. They can do that.

(Heather, dialogue, UK, 9/9/10)

Just the fact that you're the creator, and you've done it. You've taken responsibility for that... you decided to put red just there. The creative process is not being controlled by somebody else.

(Ali, GD5.2, UK, 3/2/12)

Focussing specifically on the final comment in the composite description above – a quality of the difference or 'specialness' of the space – this is obviously a deeply subjective perspective; to generalise how practitioners know they have achieved the creation of a space which feels different or special for each unique group of participants is hardly meaningful. Most comments relating to this quality in the space used as reference points the contrast between how the space itself feels and whatever is outside the space; between the norms within the space and whatever participants' everyday experience tells them is the norm. In Mexico the perspectives on the value of a space apart from the

everyday were particularly evident, with almost every Mexican respondent in my study talking of the need for a different kind of space:

This space functions as a therapeutic space, a rehabilitation space in many ways - for example for young people with addictions... (It's not a one-off here, we have tons of this...)

(Project director 'Carlos', dialogue, Mexico, 26/10/11)

We're surrounded by so much violence, and so much stress and so many issues – These spaces are really needed.

(‘Maria’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11).

In this sense the arts workshops (especially in Mexico but also in the UK) represent a sanctuary, and a place that offers the opportunity to regain a sense of humanity, respect and dignity.

Interpreting the Multidimensional Spatial Framework

Detachable space

So far in this chapter I have focussed on the prominence of the building of distinctive spaces, and on the spatial dimensions and qualities practitioners discussed. All of these findings describe a sophisticated manipulation of space by participatory arts practitioners. This subtle spatial awareness and facility is rarely visible and can easily be underestimated as a core element in an ecology of successful workshop practice. Through their work with space in three different dimensions (*physical, dynamic affective* and *imaginative* space), practitioners' strategies for constructing temporal-spatial boundaries have been

considered, and for marking their project spaces out as distinctive, separate, and functioning differently from everyday life beyond the space. Using the material reported above, and beginning here with further reflections on spatial properties in the work, I explore an analysis of why practitioners prioritise establishing a multidimensional spatial framework, within which – and only within which – other aspects of the practice can operate effectively.

The ways in which arts practitioners were found to create specific spaces for their work is clearly related to the weaving of the distinctive fabric of values in the project space, discussed in detail in Chapter 5. The physical space where the project sessions take place might be seen as forming the hub, or physical epicentre, of that project culture, situated within an everyday community setting. This is perfectly exemplified by the participant observation account of the lantern-making space analysed above. So here, as in all other examples of this work, the '*project space*' can be understood as a concept which encompasses both its physical environment (in which activity takes place), and its non-physical expression – a project culture, manifest in the behaviours and engagements between people.

As an extension of this line of thinking, the 'project space' may not always be confined to the physical environment where project activity is centred, but may be carried, with the group, to other physical spaces – as in the case of a community lanterns parade. Reprising an illustration which appeared in the opening vignette to the thesis:

Even though the air is cold, the parade feels compact and cheerful, and hence warm. It's hard to explain. Inside the parade it feels protected from the cold, but also inclusive and somehow spiritually uplifting, there is a definite feeling of being inside something.

(Field notes, UK, 4/2/12)

In this sense the 'project space' is not bound to, but detachable from, its physical epicentre. Furthermore, much community-based arts project activity takes place in ordinary rooms, which are rarely a dedicated project space – as for example the prefab hut next to the church mentioned above. The virtual 'project space' is in operation while the arts practitioners and group are there, and saturates all – both people and room. But this is only a temporary territorialisation of the physical space, which returns to an ordinary space when the project or the workshop session is over, and arts practitioners and participant groups leave. While for project participants this place might always evoke the 'project space', for others not involved in the project, there is no lingering essence of the 'project space' in this respect: the room is just the room. This highlights that not only is the virtual project space detachable from its physical space as epicentre, but also that the physical project space is not wholly identified with nor determined by the project. Both can exist independently, and yet paradoxically seem intrinsically linked to each other when the physical space is in active project use.

This, then, is a spatial concept with unusually fluid properties, closely aligned to 'liminoid' qualities described in Turner's work on ritual, to which I return again later. Parallels could be seen with a religious meeting held weekly in a community hall, or a martial arts 'Dojo' (training space where the martial arts 'do' or *way*, its philosophy, is studied (James & Jones, 1982)) in a sports centre. In the latter, the use of symbols – including ritualised behaviours, colours and uniforms, arranging temporary shrine in the space, and dressing the walls with revered texts in Japanese calligraphy – is noted as fundamental to establishing the meaning or intention of the space (Donoghue, 1990). This

space at this time is thus recognised as specific, and reinforced with qualities of the quasi spiritual:

The dojo is treated with respect by karateka [karate practitioners] and endowed with symbolic significance, for stepping into a dojo is like stepping into another world where different standards and values operate. The dojo assumes a sacred and inviolable quality, thus enabling karateka to imbue their actions with meaning, and to separate their karate from the wider world. (James & Jones, 1982)

Although the karate dojo example uses set systems drawn from a strong tradition rather than relying on the solutions developed by each individual lead practitioner for demarcating a special workspace (as is the case in the improvised spaces used by some projects in my study), these spatial strategies share the use of symbols to dignify a temporary space with identifying qualities, to enhance its potency for activity participants. With these reflections in mind it is therefore more meaningful to see the community-based participatory arts project space as defined not by its specific *properties*, but by its specific *qualities*: specifying a *qualitative* spatial framework for the work.

‘Liminoid’ space

In relation to the nature of the project space created by participatory arts practitioners working with children in primary school settings, Atkinson and Robson suggest that using strategies to build ‘liminality’ may be key to the spatial practice of these arts workers (Atkinson & Robson, 2012). Using Turner’s analysis, the more diverse project spaces observed in my own study might be better described as Turner’s ‘liminoid’. ‘Liminal’ and ‘liminoid’ spaces, according

to Turner, share certain basic characteristics including the sense of a space engendering a 'state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states'... 'full of potency and potentiality. It may also be full of experiment and play. There may be a play of ideas, a play of words, a play of symbols, a play of metaphors. In it, play's the thing' (Turner, 1979, pp. 465-466). However the characteristics of 'liminoid' spaces that distinguish them from 'liminal' spaces include the following, which seem to match the conditions and processes of participatory arts spaces very well. They display plurality in form – for example the wide variety of art form activity which takes place in the projects in my study, and the individual approaches practitioners develop; are often experimental or exploring new ways of functioning – exemplified in my cases by the intuitive approach to space-building strategies, as well as the centrality of intuition to what goes on within these spaces; may be a space entered and re-entered many times in parallel to everyday life – which is true of all the work in my study; and are often instigated by individuals who follow no set map, leaving them 'more idiosyncratic and quirky, more "spare, original and strange" than liminal phenomena' (Turner, 1979, p. 493). This better fits the profile of the broad spectrum of activity clustering under the umbrella term 'community-based participatory arts', for which there is no universal code of practice, and in which practitioners develop their own solutions to approach the challenges that face their groups.

A congenial space?

As reported above, distinctive qualities were found to be characteristic of numerous participatory arts project spaces. The overall qualitative description

of such spaces is summed up by many scholars using the phrase ‘a congenial space’ (Everitt & Hamilton, 2003; Philipp, Baum, & Macnaughton, 2002; Smith, 2001). However the word ‘congenial’ has some overtones which, based on my findings, may mark it out as misplaced or misleading. Because the term is so prevalent in the literature I will now set it against my findings to test its suitability.

The text book and online Oxford English Dictionary definition of ‘congenial’ is the following:

‘Congenial

adjective

- (of a person) pleasing or liked on account of having qualities or interests that are similar to one’s own: *his need for some congenial company*
- (of a thing) pleasant or agreeable because suited to one’s taste or inclination.’

(Oxford University Press, 2008; www.oup.com).

In effect this definition indicates little more than the pleasing nature of a person or thing, and in this it seems somewhat inadequate as a term to describe the kind of complex, multifaceted space depicted in the findings reported here. Furthermore, the aspect of the definition that indicates pleasantness due to a similarity of interests or qualities, or suitability of taste, seems to conjure an image of a different kind of environment than those typical of participatory arts projects. The ‘congenial’ space suggests a project that ignores a plurality of backgrounds, personalities, tastes and interests or starting points, and indeed seems to presuppose a choice to participate in such a space based on the ease of similarity. In my findings however, not only is the initial encounter between participant and project space in this work often

marked by an unfamiliarity and difference from other experiences, but the relationships made within the spaces – for example between the arts practitioners and the project participants – are often also marked by a mutual curiosity due to dissimilarity, unfamiliarity, a degree of otherness:

The relationship is very interesting; the women are Muslim, all wear traditional Pakistani salwar kameez and hijab (long tunic, narrow pyjama leggings and a headscarf), very neat, clean and careful. Lou is very different indeed, sparkly and patterned tee shirt and top, coloured jeans, unkempt brightly dyed hair. But they clearly enjoy each others' company – there is a twinkle in the eyes of individual women when Lou is (frequently) teasing them, or self-mocking...

(Field notes, UK, 17/7/12)

In short, the congenial qualities of this kind of project space are rarely a starting point, though may sometimes be the end destination of a project, where similarities are discovered or developed through the project process. However the unfamiliar or dissimilar qualities of the space, which mark it out as somewhere apart, are, indeed, a common and deliberate starting point.

Based on my findings I contest that the scope of the term 'congenial' leaves it inadequate to encompass the range of qualitative hallmarks shared by the most transformative community arts project spaces. The term 'a congenial space' gives misguided emphasis to less important and less prevalent elements of these project spaces (for example the fact that a space feels comfortable though its familiarity), and ignores aspects (such as surprise and difference) that may in fact lend the space its potency – an idea explored further in the discussion chapter below.

Transformative space

If we accept that the generic nature of spaces in this work is liminoid, a space apart, where participants embrace new experiences and are guided through what may be transformative processes together, it remains important to reflect on why practitioners prioritise this complex element of their practice: constructing, with great care and attention to detail, this multi-dimensional 'liminoid' spatial framework within which to work. Drawing the essential elements from my reporting on what practitioners are doing with space on all the various levels, and acknowledging beyond doubt that much time and effort is committed to these spatial processes, I suggest the following. Motivated – as explored in Chapter 5 above – by their desire to facilitate transformative experiences, which project participants can use to catalyse change in their lives, these practitioners are intuitively reaching for their most powerful tool, which I propose is for any artist the creative imagination.

As I have outlined previously, arts practitioners believe in the potential transformative power of creativity. If, therefore, arts practitioners believe that accessing the environment of the creative imagination is the key to enabling change, then in order to give breath to the creative imagination, and to enable others in their groups to access the creative space within themselves, practitioners commonly engage a particular process. They seek to build protected spaces, where people feel imaginatively free, where they can take risks, be vulnerable, experiment with changes to how they see or do things, and can try being different, make mistakes un-judged, reflect honestly and openly with others, and sense their own power and potential. In fact all of these ideas appear within the findings reported in this and preceding chapters. So finally I

have proposed that the space that can enable the degree of freedom and experimentation arts practitioners need, to work with creativity and the imagination in their workshops, requires and deserves careful attention and must be given priority within the practice. Without careful attention to constructing the multi-dimensional spatial framework, practitioners doubt that their work can achieve its potential outcomes of change.

In Chapters 4 to 7 I have laid out five of the six elements of the practice that my research findings suggest together form a coherent and common practice assemblage, used by practitioners across my research sample, both in the UK and in Mexico. This assemblage comprises a fluid ability to work in an intuitive mode, shared commitment and motivations for the work, the weaving of a strong, shared, fabric of values and principles – in effect an ethical framework for the project – and the painstaking co-construction with project participants of two further qualitative frameworks in which to house the project activity – a relational and a spatial framework. I now move on to explore the final, core element of this practice – collective engagement in creative arts activity, and the use of creativity itself to facilitate change and promote flourishing – the element I am calling *The Creative Key*.

Chapter 8

The Creative Key

The key element

Every case in my field study, and all the further examples referred to by practitioner respondents in their dialogues and group discussions, has a set of common characteristics. There is always a project, unfolding over a period of time, in which specialist arts practitioners come together with a group of other people, often from a specific local or non-geographic community, who are their collaborators in this situation: the participants in a process. As previously discussed, everybody involved in these projects contributes to what happens, and by this contribution plays an active part in shaping the experience. Much time and effort is committed to developing what practitioners feel are the conditions they need, in order for their participatory arts work with the group to have the best chance of offering something worthwhile to participants. The mechanisms of this process discussed so far include the investment of a high level of commitment, development of a workshop ecology founded on values and principles, and a spatial and a relational framework within which to collaborate. These elements of the practice assemblage may be recognisable

to non-arts practitioners who work in similar settings and with similar groups, since such elements do not rely on creative or arts-specific skills.

So the question still remains, what are arts practitioners doing in this work that marks out their practice as specific, providing its common, *arts-based* core? The focus of this chapter is the final key element of the 'practice assemblage' that I propose is operating in these projects. This is the element clearly based on the practitioners' specialist arts expertise. It comprises the creative activities and experiences they initiate in their workshops. However these are not just the advertised arts activities by which the workshop is known; for example a dance-, theatre-, music-, poetry-, performance-, sculpture-, or video project. (This headline activity may often be more specifically defined: break dance, community theatre, performance poetry, stop-frame animation, recycled or organic materials sculpture, and so on.) Despite these art form differences, all the arts practitioners in my study are also drawing on a series of generic characteristics of creativity for their work.

The findings reported below trace how arts practitioners were harnessing creativity in a wide variety of ways to deliver their projects, and I link these descriptions to key ideas in the literature. I am calling this element of a core practice assemblage *The Creative Key*, which I now explore in depth.

The Creative Process as a Journey

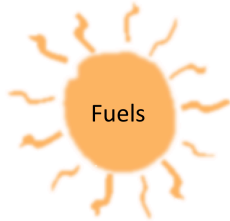
The creative process is learning, and moving on through what you've learnt to a different place. 'I learnt this, and it's taken me from here - this place, to here - a different place.' It's a movement.

(Juan', dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

The data generated on creative processes in this work cluster into categories. I am structuring their presentation using the metaphor of a journey, which is an analogy proposed by practitioner 'Juan's' comment above, and often referred to by other contributors. The journey metaphor I use, however, like 'Juan's' description suggests no particular map, no linear sequence from A to C via B; instead it simply conveys a change of position, resulting from a kinetic process. I have identified four types of stimulus in this process: setting out with their group of journeying participants, my findings suggest that creative practitioners make four kinds of creative contribution to such a journey. Firstly, their experience as creative artists provides them with core competencies which are in play throughout the journey. These inputs (such as their facility with imagination already highlighted above) are reported here as the *fuels* for the trip. Secondly I outline specific arts-based tools and devices (such as their use of metaphor for example), which practitioners introduce for particular purposes based on their knowledge of how creativity works. These are grouped as aspects providing the metaphorical *vehicles* for propelling the process forwards. Thirdly there are descriptions of the process of the creative experience itself (such as embracing risk and the unknown), which I symbolise as the passage of transit through *territories of creativity*. Finally there are descriptions of secondary processes (such as reflection), set in motion during this passage. These are presented as the metaphorical *views* of the journey landscape. Thus throughout this chapter I discuss these aspects of creative processes as they arose in my study, using the journey metaphors of *fuels*, *vehicles*, *creative territories* and *landscape views* to help organise the reporting.

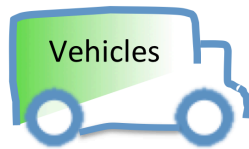
Figure 8.1 The creative process: conceptualised as four journey features

Artists' intrinsic qualities and skills as *fuels*:



Imaginative skill;
Commitment to artistic quality, perseverance;
Difference, unconventionality, marginality.

Use of generic creative devices as *vehicles*:



Metaphor;
Intensive absorption, 'flow';
The act of making something;
The inclination for making experiences 'special';
Fun, playfulness, joking.

Passage through experiences common in creative processes – the *territories* of creativity:



Experimentation;
The unknown;
Risk;
Disorientation, or chaos.

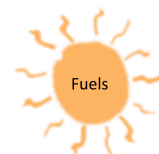
Common responses to creative experiences, allowing new perspective, new *views of the landscape*:



Powerful unifying moments;
Opportunities for stepping outside, for reflection;
New ways of seeing familiar realities.

Figure 8.1 above shows a summary of these features of creative processes evident in the projects in my study.

As explained previously my investigation has not studied the outcomes of the practice I am researching, a focus increasingly common elsewhere in the literature on community arts and health. For this reason there is no category here for an ultimate outcome of the trip, or a metaphorical *arrival*. The focus here is on the mechanisms of the process, the journey itself, although some contributors did discuss outcomes they had witnessed or experienced, and outcomes they hoped to achieve in their work. Brief references are made to these where they help to clarify the journeying processes being described.



Creative Fuels for the Trip

As trained artists, and often still practicing in their own right, creative practitioners in this work each have their specialist artform background as a creative fuel for the journey, a competency which is fundamental for this element of the practice assemblage. However, as well as this artform-specific input, they also bring other creative competencies and attributes deriving from being artists. Three of these, the imagination, attention to quality, and the allure of alterity, are now discussed, as fuels, which enable the creative journey to move – sometimes at a pace.



The imagination

The process of constructing the set for the animated scene is fascinating. A large box is retrieved from a back room behind the school kitchen, and from it spill numerous oddments which to me look like the leftover remnants of an outdoor jumble sale: several large pieces of rough-cut cloth of different colours and textures, pieces of moss, twigs, a box of small animal figures, two half-formed miniature plasticine figures – one of a dog and one a person – and a cardboard model hut with dry mud glued to the roof. This rough paraphernalia contrasts sharply with the high-tech camera and professional lighting equipment being set up on tripods, focus trained on a small table, and at first I am confused: surely a set made from these materials will not be adequate to produce a film of high enough visual quality! Seeing the box, the team of five lads involved in their customary chaotic behaviour and constantly confrontational interactions, suddenly abandon their hyperactivity to begin building the scene. Bryan helps two of the boys organise cloth, moss and twigs (crumpled cloth backdrop strewn with bits of outdoor woodland material, precariously balanced, and a tiny twig campfire constructed centrally, with what look like orange and red plasticine worms protruding through the twigs.) Meanwhile Cath is piecing together arms, legs, bodies and heads of the main character and his dog, with industrious input from the other three lads. They finally draw onto paper and cut out four small circles depicting different cartoon-style facial expressions: smiling, shocked, angry and asleep. The first of these (asleep) is roughly tacked to the head of the small figure, and some brushed sheep's wool attached above (for hair). He is positioned reclining on a rock by the campfire, his dog nearby. Abdul is at the camera, and meticulously focuses the lens on the ramshackle scene, clicking one shot – meanwhile Imran darts a hand in and bends the plasticine fire worms very slightly. Another click. Imran darts in again, another slight tweak: another shot. The stop-frame scene is unfolding before my eyes, these are the flames of a flickering campfire! The miniature world created by the group becomes more and more real within the pool of light. Yet stand back, and with a dissociated eye it looks like a jumble of rubbish. The earnestness with which the group creates a complete imaginary world from ad hoc bits and pieces here in this large, empty school dining hall is impressive. I am completely drawn in. We have to stop

intermittently and laugh when main character Mr Martin's arm keeps falling off, then his head, and people keep inventing surreal potential storylines to accommodate these minor catastrophes. But we all know they're just messing about with ideas – each team member is holding the map of the agreed storyboard in their mind's eye, waiting until the story can proceed. The shared humour feels very bonding. There is one highly surreal, spontaneous development to the plot when a plastic lion figure enters stage left on the inspiration of Imran, in response to which one of the other boys rapidly exchanges Mr Martin's facial expression to 'shocked', and the dog falls over. This moment remains in the film – everyone satisfied that it adds something indefinable.

*(Field notes, participant-observation of stop-frame animation project, UK,
31/5/12)*

In discussing intuition in the practice in an earlier section I refer to the importance of arts practitioners using their imagination, which is a subject most practitioners comment on in their research contributions, and their imaginative capacity is a central theme in my findings. In the animation project outlined above an example is presented of the power of creating a shared imaginary world, in which a suspension of disbelief is necessary, but which then allows a small group of teenage boys with normally very distracted behaviour patterns to remain focused. The observations highlight, (after several sessions working together), how readily they accept the arts practitioners' lead in transforming a box of 'ad hoc' objects into a 'miniature world'. This is a world which they can control and 'animate' – bringing to life an imagined reality of their making. They delight in permission to 'mess about with ideas', and improvise on sudden inspiration; however they have a pre-imagined and agreed chain of events that each of them is able to hold 'in their mind's eye' as a narrative, and which each group member is helping to unfold according to this map. In this excerpt the special input of the practitioners is in modelling, through their own creative conviction, the willingness to invest time, attention and imagination in this

endeavour. They are taking the world fabricated according to the boys' ideas very seriously – enough to create a film. Following their lead the boys can suspend their own disbelief and enter the world they are creating sufficiently to focus, and they enjoy a shared sense of humour at stretching that reality into some surreal borderland territory: playing with the ridiculous. The secret here lies in how seriously artists take the fruits of the imagination. They commit to it and trust it as a world worthy of adult time and attention. These simple steps with the power of the imagination suggest a path, using the miniature scene as a test ground, towards seeing the world and its possibilities with a new freedom and a new perspective. For educational philosopher Maxine Greene, reflecting on the ideas of Mary Warnock,

'It is imagination – with its capacity to both make order out of chaos and open experience to the mysterious and the strange – that moves us to go in quest, to journey where we have never been;' (Greene, 1995, p. 23)

The path, or quest, described in the field notes, and by Greene's distillation of the contribution of the imagination, is also discussed by practitioners in the following two dialogues:

Artists (also) have a way of really working with the imagination, and at these times, what's really needed is a sense of how do we create an imagination to see that transformation, change, a different way of being, and to tap into that in ourselves as – possible; it's like a kind of otherness...

(Ruth, Skype, 3/4/12)

It's like the guy who painted the bison in the caves at Altamira (Spain). The shaman paints the bison to learn reality, to appropriate reality (make it his/her own), and to modify reality – because, yes it's a bison, but it's also not this bison any more...it's something else. There's a distance: to imagine

is to distance yourself from reality (to move away from it. Place yourself at a distance from it). To make an image of what's real, and move it somewhere else. So it's learning (in both senses) learning from reality, and appropriating reality for ourselves.

(‘Juan’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

Together these examples present a complex exploration of the relevance of ‘imagining’ in this work, as a fuel for a creative journey of possibility and change. In the dialogue excerpts each contributor – one a theatre practitioner in the UK and the other a Mexican wood worker and set designer – presents the process of imagining as a way of giving breath to a new reading of reality, and what is possible. Through this a step is taken towards appropriating new potential realities. These interpretations suggest potent applications of the imaginative capacity, mentioned time and time again by my research respondents, and in obvious constant use in the work.

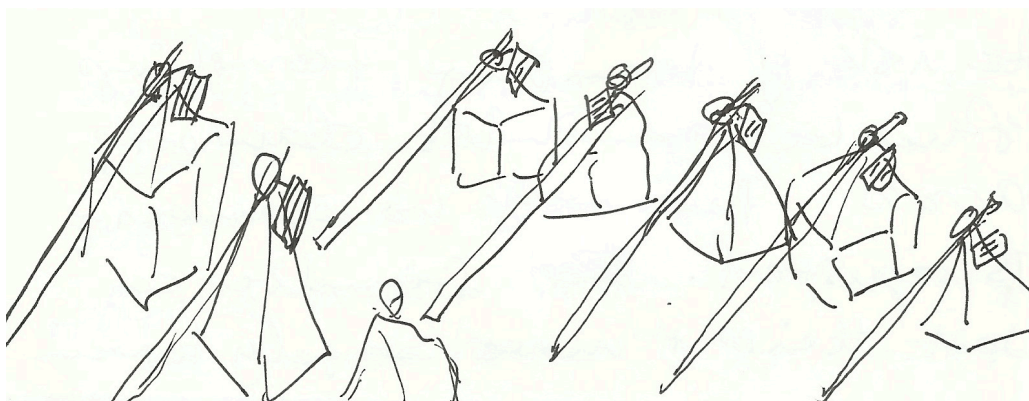
Alongside their depth of experience, as artists, in accessing the fuel of imagination for use in their work, my findings suggest that arts practitioners bring with them other specialist attributes highly developed through their experience with creativity, or focused in their identity as artists. Such fuels include some already reported in previous thesis sections: intuition and a willingness and ability to improvise and to risk experimentation, already discussed in Chapter 4; the ability to make uncompromising commitment to the detail and the quality of their work, and to invest the work with unfaltering positivity, already discussed in Chapter 5; and the perceived ‘difference’ of artists, whereby their often unconventional mores are at odds with the mainstream (previously referred to as the artists’ ‘marginality’). I will now

explore two of these through the lens of their relevance to creativity in the practice.



Attention to quality: a vote of confidence

Mary has suggested a plan: to move the large lanterns out of the hall, and lay out all the smaller ones in colour-label rows. A bamboo cane (pre-prepared, with a masking tape binding securing a pre-cut length of string) is attached to the hook at the top of each lantern, for carrying it. All the sticks are laid out in one direction, with space for each row of lanterns to avoid tripping over random canes.



There's a lot of thought and experience in this simple plan: the families will all arrive at a similar time to collect their precious made lantern (there are 60 labelled ones so far, others will be labelled as soon as possible). Those arriving will be less concerned with care towards the other lanterns in the room than with finding their own. Since the structures are fragile, the system with rows includes much space between the rows, as well as between individual lanterns, to minimise the risk of trampling and crushing other lanterns while clambering across. This way, no clambering is required. Families can spot theirs and move safely between other lanterns to collect it. The further detail in this system is that each lantern is given a named, colour-coded label to show year-group, or date when it was made as a family. This is tied to the wire hook at the top of the lantern and laid face-up to be as visible as possible. It's this kind of care and

attention to detail that is at the heart of this work. Thought is put into every single aspect of how to make the community able to enjoy the event, feeling respected and without friction – for example due to damage to lanterns. Seeing one's own lantern 'presented' as part of a whole host of varied ones that are all treated with equal care and respect is an important symbolic expression of feeling valued, included, part of something big, important. This provides a model of how respect, inclusion and equality can be demonstrated. Such simple, small details, but not insignificant by any means. These details take time and care, they have been developed over years of 'refinement' and creative problem solving, and are now passed on to this lanterns team.

So the enormous team sets to work, moving, arranging, carrying large lanterns in pairs, labelling, attaching canes and making sure the rows work. The team works together so smoothly it's formidable. There are stewards with a hand-drawn illustration showing where all the larger lanterns need laying out around the playground – it's beautiful. I admire and comment, and the steward (either teacher, or lunchtime supervisor, I'm not sure) says – 'oh yes, Mary made it!' This is another detail. The map from each year's parade is later framed and displayed amongst the previous ones on the staff room wall. It clearly gives pleasure to have so much care and thought taken.

(Field notes, UK, 4/2/12)



Figure 8.2: Arts practitioner Mary surveys one batch of lanterns

This participant observation picks out the careful attention to details and the consideration given to the quality of people's experience, which come through as characteristic features of the practice in my study. Such details and

personal touches take much time and effort. However despite time pressure and exhaustion these details are still prioritised. The message this conveys is affirmative: practitioners choose to demonstrate by their actions that they consider each person important and valuable enough to commit time and effort to in this way. A commitment to the related notion of artistic quality (as far as such a concept can be broached without discussing who is the judge of quality and by what criteria), already discussed in Chapter 5, also plays a role in this messaging:

'I think we have pretty exacting standards about the quality of what we produce [...] I think the things that are created here are about expressing your uniqueness: those lanterns are the physical manifestation of that community'

(Mary, 'Borge' dialogue, UK, 10/2/11)



Figure 8.3: Artistic quality and individuality promoted and supported

The authenticity of Mary's reflection on this point is born out by my own reflections after participating in a lantern-making workshop she was co-leading with another practitioner:

An interesting dynamic was evident towards the end [of the workshop], reflecting on the shapes and designs of specific lanterns. Complex designs solicit positive encouraging responses from the artists. However these lanterns require more expertise from them, to resolve subtle design issues –figuring out specifics of which withy joint to hang the lantern from, and whether it needs different types of fittings because it's not standard. This is time-consuming and energy-sapping, but it appears to be important to the artists to support the exploratory design and construction process – artistically the products are better, more 'beautiful'.

(Field Notes, UK, 2/2/11)

Here, again, the message is that the aspiration to the highest quality attainable, and the extra effort required for this, is a positive reflection of how highly people and place are valued by these practitioners. In Mexico several arts practitioners explicitly work with participants towards a quality threshold of producing saleable artwork.

'When somebody starts to do something beautiful, interesting, when they start to get praised and the teachers says 'look what you did!', you start to become an important person within this community, people are telling you what you did has value'.

(‘Alonso’, dialogue, Mexico, 14/11/11)

Thus investment in high quality materials, as well as in time to nurture the artistic quality of the process and (if there is one) the product are considered important as an expression the value of individuals and of their community.

I encountered elsewhere in my fieldwork an example demonstrating the same point from the opposite perspective. I visited a community lanterns project very similarly conceived to the case described in the field notes above, but this time, I discovered, with the minimum of artist input. In this project the organisers from the local authority proposed that community members themselves should

lead on all aspects of the project, except in the technical aspects of constructing the large, complex communal lantern designs, which was seen by these officers as the specialist domain of the artist. I visited the making workshops here, as well as attending the event itself, and had an experience that was very different from participant-observations in other projects in my study. The following account from participant observation draws out some interesting comparisons:

Spent the day with the core team tidying and making/remaking lanterns ready for Wednesday's parade. Everyone seems pretty depleted. [...] We spent quite a lot of time today 'repairing' wobbly lanterns, which sometimes meant completely remaking them. It always meant stripping off the tissue covering, which was a sad thing to have to do. It felt like throwing away the expressive efforts of the children who'd made them in the first place – but there was no other choice, they were not robust enough to be carried, or to carry candles or lights. Health and safety concerns are too important. At one point team members were literally stamping on weak lanterns, crushing them. There was quite a lot of sighing...

This necessary late-stage quality control has become a feature because the team of parents has been running lantern workshops in schools, with no artist present, feeling that they didn't need help with this aspect of the project. Their ambition is amazing, but it's now obvious, today in the final run-up to the parade, that they have missed the eye for artistic quality, structural safety, and attention to detail provided in such projects by the skilled arts practitioner: the confidence, clarity and care typical of projects artists would have saved a lot of remaking work at this late stage. The negative effect of disqualifying children's efforts is disheartening for all of us, and some team members express frustration by grumbling, and withdrawing their good will for a while.

(Field notes, UK, 7/3/11)

This excerpt from field notes indicates significant differences in the character of the workshop ambiance here, and my sensitivity to this lends the

account itself a certain lack of distance – a flavour of disappointment. Negativity is not an atmosphere I experienced in other projects in my study, and this counterbalancing outlier is useful for a more nuanced understanding. The description again points to the positive value of time and care invested in the detail of supporting people's creative efforts, and to the skill in the judgement and guidance needed to achieve a product that can engender pride. In the same way that positivity seems to spiral within many projects as a result of these factors, so here negativity seems to gather due to their lack, and in the end the parents themselves demonstrate through their actions a feeling that their contribution may be undervalued.

Attention to detail, refinement and perfectionism are fundamental characteristics of artistic excellence and, as highlighted in Chapter 5, are also an aspect of artists' training:

'The best artists, you have to remember, want to make the best work they possibly can at all times. There isn't a moment that goes by when I think in my work, 'actually I can be mediocre today' – it just does not happen. The artist's own desire for excellence is one of your greatest assets when working in one of these projects.'

(Ben Dunks, practitioner, NHS webinar, 20/9/12).

There are practitioners whose artistic perfectionism can become a burden to them in this work, as well as being destructive to the project. This is something Ben – a dancer and arts and health practitioner – also notes in his web discussion, and is something I have seen in my previous evaluation work. In my experience the friction inherent in these situations often leads such practitioners to move away from participatory work, since the feedback from the experience is too uncomfortable. Thus the quest for excellence in this work

can be seen as a balance between the artist's own creative perfectionism, and their focus on the needs of participants. A healthy balance functions as a foundation stone of quality and commitment in project delivery, feeding positivity and providing a vote of confidence for project participants.



The power of difference

After leaving the coffee shop we walk into the square outside, discussing a field observation visit I will make to Lance's workshop. Lance is wearing casual sports clothes (t-shirt and loose pants), a cap, trainers. He always wears a narrow gold chain. As a dancer he is slim, obviously physically fit but with a light build. I always notice that he moves quite languidly, never with haste or impulsive gestures, and he doesn't pull up to his full height: he doesn't take much space. He also speaks quietly and quite hesitantly. On the other hand he is obviously very relaxed – noticeable in his fluid and open gestures. In the sunshine outside we lean against a bollard next to a small public art sculpture, and while we're talking three boys come up, blatantly bobbing up and down in our eye-line to grab Lance's attention. They are perhaps 13 or 14, and dressed quite scruffily, also in casual sports clothes. One wears a cap. Another is missing a tooth I notice. 'Sorry about this, it always happens' Lance says to me, then, still leaning on the bollard turns to the boys: 'Hey, how's it going?' he says to them, still quietly, friendly, raising eyebrows but not exactly smiling. 'I know you don't I?' he says to one of the boys, who grins without speaking. This teenager suddenly looks much younger to me now, he can't take his eyes off Lance. All three have stopped gyrating and stand shyly in the sunshine. The first boy eventually nods. 'I've worked with you haven't I, is it Liam? What you up to these days then? Still dancing?' The boy shakes his head still grinning. There's a pause, then he suddenly asks Lance 'Is that a cross?' pointing to the chain, 'Yeah it is.' 'Are you a Christian then?' 'I am, yeah' Lance responds, without flinching at the directness of this exchange. The boy nods, accepting the response with a knowing expression. 'What happened to your tooth?' Lance asks the other boy. 'Fighting.' 'Oh, that's not good!'

The chat continues for several minutes while I stand next to Lance, apparently completely invisible to these young acolytes. Finally they close the conversation by exchanging knuckle grazes and respectful head tilts, and Lance turns back to me. 'Sorry about that,' he says again, 'sometimes I feel like the pied piper or something, it's weird, there's always some kids right there, and they follow me!' He seems embarrassed. If Lance's manner were not so unassuming it would be less of a surprise that he continually attracts a small following. I am also struck though by how direct and relaxed he was in his exchange with this group, even before he recognised one of them. He gave them attention apparently without question. 'They just want to be noticed, you know, and that lad used to be in trouble all the time. I hope he's getting it together better now'.

(Field notes, setting for meeting with 'Lance', UK, 28/8/12)

This section of field notes draws out the small ways in which, despite a reluctance to project himself as noticeable or important, this arts practitioner can effect a degree of magnetism, which can set him apart or mark him out as different from other people. In an earlier research dialogue with break-dancer 'Lance', he had already mentioned the interesting ways in which the young people he works with react to him, and the fact that some young people take every possible chance to spend time with him so that he sees them every single day, sometimes twice a day. We attempted at the time to understand their reactions to him – the following excerpt is taken from that dialogue:

[Researcher] *How do they see you? Who do you think you are to them?*

The kids are like...[laughs] I don't know, they're funny, I don't know, they just - they shout and stuff when they see me, and things like that, and they just sort of get all excited and jump around, it's funny! The teachers get mad, you know, when I come through a lesson or something like that. Sometimes they're just funny like that, you know. They'll compare me and say I'm somebody else that I'm not, like for example, like... [laughs] they have a favourite wrestler or something, and

they'll say that's who I am, you know. They're just excited aren't they....I think it's just 'cause nobody does what I'm doing, they don't see it often really, in [this town] maybe, or something like that...so...

[Researcher] *So you're a bit unusual for them?*

Yeah, they just see it on TV, or on a video... well they don't see me, but...

[Researcher] *So it's a bit like you're from another world, come in to their world?*

Yeah, yeah.

(‘Lance’, Dialogue, UK, 11/01/12)

The children and young people who react so powerfully to their contact with ‘Lance’ seem to be bringing together associations of specialness, including style and celebrity, as well as icons or personal heroes, and ‘Lance’ is the repository for this collection of important, positive associations⁸.

Such magnetism of course cannot fail to be buttressed, and may even be magnified, by the investment of positivity and commitment discussed above as typically shown by the arts practitioners towards projects, participant and collaborators. ‘Lance’ is no exception in this, since he regularly gives up weekends to take young people to dance contests, and has worked unpaid for several years (since a teenager himself) to enable local youngsters to dance:

I think a lot of people don't really care, d'you know, sometimes. So sometimes I think that if I didn't do it nothing would happen, if you know what I mean - I've seen that no-one else will do that, work with kids and stuff like that [...] I teach as many kids as I can, and at least they have

⁸ This kind of response is not specific to ‘Lance’: similar magnetism was evident towards all the practitioners in my study whom I witnessed with their groups, whatever their art form, age or gender.

something, you know because a lot of kids, especially in [city name], don't have anything, and I can understand that. So I think, if I teach, they've got something to do.

(‘Lance’, dialogue, UK, 10/1/12,)

Any further reasons for their choice of ‘Lance’ as the target for adulation from his protégés may be multiple and complex. He is young for example, and he is relaxed and informal, and physical, characteristics very in tune with youth culture; however he is caring rather than adopting or exuding the kind of machismo more obviously popular with young and teenage boys, and he is quiet rather than commanding. With the boys in the street even ‘Lance’s’ Christian faith, though often considered a personal attribute that is off-putting amongst young people, does not count against him. The single factor which seems to contribute the most clearly to Lance’s ‘Pied piper’ magnetism is his artist identity: he is a dancer, therefore he is not a standard adult. As a break-dancer he carries associations of popular celebrity culture, and being from ‘another world’. This different world may carry associations of fame and wealth, though despite achieving continuing success as a dancer neither of these realities pertains for ‘Lance’; however, this otherness may also carry associations of freedom, and possibilities of other paths forward, which I will examine below.

The theme of difference, elsewhere in this chapter explored as ‘marginality’, is very prevalent in my research data. The subject of the perceived ‘difference’ of artists is debated at length in several group discussions with my research respondents – the excerpts below offering some insights to their analysis:

[Researcher] *How do you think people see you?*

People seem to think it gives you a license – you have got permission because you're an artist ... actually I can do anything – well it depends... but actually by calling yourself an artist they say 'oh it's ok, you're' an artist'!

[Researcher] *How, why do you think that gives you permission? What lets them give you permission?*

You're outside the world that is convention. I think people crave that, that's why it's romanticised. I think there's a craving from them.

[Researcher] *To be that?*

*I think so, it's about this idea of freedom. People use the word freedom.
(Lou, GD3, UK, 19/8/11)*

Here one practitioner is exploring what she perceives as the advantages of an otherness associated with artists, a perception of artists as beyond social norms; this signifies a kind of abandon which others view as a freedom, and which they enjoy being close to, or a part of. This theme was taken a step further in a different group discussion a year before, focussing again on the associations artists hold amongst others in society, and expectations they sometimes feel from project participants:

*It's a bit like an outlaw status, like you're going to kind of ride over the hill.
(A)*

The seven samurai stuff... a group of outlaws, who live outside the realms of things, the hired hands, but they will protect you... (M)

They've got their own morality that's not a given. They come in with a whole set of rules, that the outlaw holds, but they're not the status quo, and that's the power of them, that's their status. (A)

(‘Alice’, Mary, GD1, UK, 24/5/10)

The practitioners here are talking about the significant status they feel is accorded to them (along with expectations of what they can do) due to their outsider persona, with associations of courage and bravery, moral integrity, the role of the avenger. However, a return to the continuation of the first dialogue reveals the other side of this same coin:

It's the thing that makes them value artists, but undervalue them all at the same time. (D)

My experience recently wasn't that brilliant – I was an outsider, and I was seen as a bit of a radical in that I didn't have to stick to the same rules as everyone else, but that wasn't seen as an especially good thing... (T)

But your role as an artist when you're in there is to stir, and mess and stuff. People are not necessarily all that comfortable with breaking out of their role. (D)

(Deborah, Talya, GD3, UK, 19/8/11)

Deborah and Talya reflect, in this exchange, briefly on the complications of the outsider position, potentially soliciting either an enviousness of the freedom, or a resistance to the threat of disruption or change to the status quo. What is interesting is that, across the study, where discussions focus on structures and institutions within which arts practitioners are often working (schools, hospitals, prisons), and the attitudes of other professionals in these settings, the latter more closed response is often reported, while an openness and an appetite to

accompany the 'marginal' artist to the other side of conventions is more often conveyed by project participants – as exemplified in the positive responses to Lance from children in schools where he works. Seldom is the reverse the case.

The examples referenced here suggest that arts practitioners, through their perceived otherness, are able to offer some project participants glimpses of alternative vistas, and through this to open up new possibilities. Their presence offers contact with people living slightly beyond convention, which can suggest a tantalising freedom; and the hint of other worlds – even fantasy worlds – which they might themselves reach, were they to accompany the arts practitioners on the journey they are offering. As has been shown in previous sections however, the arts practitioners themselves almost universally report discomfort at being seen as separate or special, a dichotomy which is reflectively explored here by a Mexican practitioner in her research dialogue:

I don't know – I have issues around the construction of the artist as a rebellious figure, this figure that is independent and free. People might think that, but thinking about an artist that way is to a certain degree romanticising the whole conception. One of the things I do all the time is work to say that there is no difference between you and me. So for me to say I'm an artist and I embrace all these ideas, and I use them as my baggage to walk through the world, would go entirely against all my work.

(‘Liliana’, dialogue, Mexico, 14/11/11)

Here ‘Liliana’ expresses her discomfort, dismissing the ‘independent rebel’ identity as a false construct, and outlining how she undertakes to minimise the distance this kind of artist image can create. Interestingly, as then emerges in the comments that follow those, in reality the situation is not so simple for her:

So maybe being a rebel is more of a consequence than a start point of a lot of the work that I do. It's a different kind of rebellion, because it's not that clichéd image of the artist as this rebel, who goes against social norms, or wants to transgress just for the idea of transgressing, but we end up transgressing certain things because we're interested in reconfiguring these things and not for the mere action of the transgression itself.

(ibid)

This more complex depiction of being forced into a 'transgressive' position in relation to structures which her work resists, despite rejecting the 'rebel' label, is a narrative that accurately reflects practitioners' experiences both in the UK and in Mexico. Most, as described here, also talk about making strenuous efforts to normalise their relationships with project participants, to undercut any aloofness or distance which may result from being seen as an outsider, or a 'rebel', and they '*work to say there is no difference between you and me*'. The arts practitioners in my study demonstrated non-complicity with any perception of them by others as charismatic, and demonstrated no such self-perception. These artists, as shown in Chapter 6 reporting attitudes and values in the work, are explicitly uncomfortable with notions of personal power or ego. Indeed there was a clear theme amongst research contributors that despite their (often extensive) training as artists, and in many cases successful careers in the arts world, they will not call themselves 'artists', and see themselves as something else (for which many seem unable to find a name). As explained in my introduction to this thesis I have accommodated their discomfort with an 'artist' identity, by referring throughout to my practitioner respondents as *arts practitioners* rather than as artists.

However although, as reported previously, arts practitioners may achieve success in building strong and more equal relationships through these efforts, in

a paradoxical twist which I will now explain, these strategies may in fact increase any allure their persona holds for some of their project participants (as articulated above, '*You're outside the world that is convention. I think people crave that*'). Artists cannot after all control how others see them. Thus in developing strong, personal, direct links with people who nevertheless still associate them with ideas of freedom, liberation from constricting conventions and other, special worlds, they may in the end, through honest, equal exchange with their workshop participants, make the proximity of these other projected realities feel closer. The very ordinariness that they seek to communicate of themselves as people may thereby paradoxically serve to increase the potency of what they represent.

This, I argue, is because the level status arts practitioners commonly seek to build in relationships with others can create the sense of a more believable, passable bridge, by which others might hope to find passage to other potential manifestations of self and the world. Imaginings of such other realities can be stimulated by spending time with the artist figure. Some people may even crave the possibility that aspects of the perceived 'otherness' of the artist may rub off on them. I examine this effect, in the discussion chapter below, through the lens of the literature on the archetypal outsider: the Jester, Fool or Trickster (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975; Hyde, 2008; Linscott Ricketts, 1966; Otto, 2001; Warde, 1915), a character discussed by one group of practitioners in my study as an analogy for their position.

Building on the three generic creative inputs (or fuels for the creative journey contributed by artists) explored here: their facility with the imagination, their commitment to creative quality with its contingent positivity, and their

associations with otherness and other worlds, I now move on to examine the creative mechanisms, the *vehicles* they use in the creative journey.



Creative Vehicles

My findings include arts practitioners' references to, and my own participant observations of, a multitude of creative devices, approaches and idiosyncratic ideas they employ, to progress with a group through the course of a project. These approaches are the arts-based tricks or tools in the arts practitioner's tool kit, and they are underpinned by core, generic creative methodologies. Those I shall describe are the use of metaphor, absorption and 'Flow', the act of making something, making spaces and things 'special', and the use of play and fun. Such strategies constitute further elements that distinguish the practice as arts-led. The execution and eventually realised form of each device will vary depending on the practitioner's artform area, so that for example the uses of metaphor in dance, writing or music each result in a different form of experience, but still use the same generic device, since all are forms of meaning making and communication. It is these generic creative methodologies that I now explore, as the *vehicles* that drive the creative process.



Use of metaphors

Ricci seems very relaxed, hosting this session with eight teenagers, all tagged, two girls and six boys. They are very understated on entering the room, all sit down on chairs, conspicuously lounging. Their cumbersome ankle tags are either hidden but still bulging beneath tracksuit pants, or else are worn ostentatiously outside their socks – a statement of their captivity. Ricci introduces local up-and-coming rapper 'Lunar C' to the group, and he performs some rhymes to show what he can do [...] When the group is set the task of analysing Lunar's lyrics Ricci is quite fast-moving in drawing out the rhyme scheme used. He encourages the young people to spot rhymes (assonance) and images (metaphors), to understand how complex the lyric composition is. The response is initially muted (I wonder if this experience is too reminiscent of school). Gradually they break the lyric down and chew it over, stopping for a moment on a line that uses an obscene metaphor. [Hesitation] 'I don't usually do this you know, work with lyrics that are so offensive,' [Ricci, grinning] 'talking about a donkey schlong – it feels so wrong! In fact it may even be illegal, I don't know...' [They laugh]. [...] Later, when the group is sitting around a table, writing their own rhymes, Lunar is sitting next to a lad who is clearly very bright and therefore quite disruptive in the session. They seem to be working well. Lunar announces 'This guy is into quite deep stuff, you know!' Another teenager near to me, very quiet, is scribbling scratchy, tiny lines on a sheet of paper, head almost touching the table with intense focus. He finally sits up, and shows his work to Ricci. I glimpse it in passing – it looks like poetry on the page, but I can't read it quickly enough to catch the text. 'This is good, really good, the images are speaking to me!' The boy looks awkward, but doesn't look away. He's taking it in.

(Field Notes, UK rap session, 30/8/12)

'Metaphor' has been explored previously in relation to exercising the imagination. As a concrete creative device, or vehicle, metaphor is multivalent. Amongst my many observations of its use in propelling a process forward, I witnessed rap artist 'Ricci' with a group of young offenders, working with lyrics, described above. This workshop was striking because, although initially sceptical about

working with language by analysing the poetic devices in these lyrics, once given control of the concept of metaphor the teenage participants became engaged in the power it gave them. This was a use of metaphor to enable a group of young offenders to express and release deep held feelings about their situation. The arts practitioner's cheeky quip in the middle of the notes about the possible illegality of what he's doing is amusing precisely because it uses metaphor to parody the youngsters' captivity in the legal system. Here metaphor is a device used for the release of tension, and for the appropriation of power and control through language, amongst a group of young people with currently little power or control over their own situation.

Metaphor is also employed within this work at a grander level as explained here by Mary in two dialogue excerpts:

Those lanterns are the physical manifestation of that community. The whole point to me is that you've got those creations, that have all been made by one or two people, but when they're all together they become that bigger thing, that lantern event, that parade, that river of light – whatever it is.

(Mary, GD1, UK, 24/5/10)

It's something about the individual, and the collective [...]. Lanterns were great because that was a way of being able to then look at what was community, it was a way of looking at your individual life, full of metaphor: 'your light's gonna shine' along with everybody else's, seeing yourself with everybody else.

(Mary, UK dialogue, 'Borge', 10.2.11, 55:00-55:14)

Here the practitioner suggests that something with a greater meaning for people can be created through quite a simple 'making' activity. She suggests that the effect of this metaphorical level of perception of the event they are

involved in enables people to view their own situation as having greater significance. She believes they can take nourishment from seeing their position framed in a different way by means of the metaphors of 'light' symbolising individuality; 'shining' symbolising importance or worth; 'parade' or collective display symbolising collectivity, community and belonging. Lakoff and Johnson propose 'it is as though the ability to comprehend experience through metaphor were like a sense, like seeing or touching or hearing, with metaphors providing the only ways to perceive and experience much of the world. Metaphor is as much a part of our functioning as our sense of touch, and as precious' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 239). If imaginative, metaphorical representation does have such a central role in consciousness, this gives those who are expert in the handling of the imagination, such as artists, a role as a key resource in relation to developing ideas, and to the process of perceptual and conceptual development. As articulated in an infamous slogan, coined by a community arts company Welfare State International, prominent in the UK in the 1970s-90s, (used as a slogan on their lorry, and subsequently in the title of their techniques handbook): *'We are Engineers of the Imagination'* (Coult, 1983).



Use of absorption and 'Flow'

The creative process itself, (which I know often has alchemical language attached to it) is a place where there is often a loss of time – a space that is unmediated, there is a relationship between the maker and the made, and is a kind of 'healthy space' if you like, I think that's because all the things that are happening in our lives that create our pain or distress are absent often at those times, because even if they are forming the content, the pain of them is often not present. That's where we are, we're with the maker and the made [...] they [our pain or distress] inhabit us still, and

they're around, but in that process of making, that pure process, that undiluted place, they are not disturbing us.

(‘Eve’, dialogue, UK, 23/1/12)

One commonly observed feature of a space in which people are involved in creating something is absorption: a state of full concentration, which is eloquently described by the practitioner in the dialogue excerpt above. She frames this state in terms of its positive effect on people who attend her workshops, who are often struggling with mental and physical health challenges, and puts forward the beginnings of a theory about how this state of absorption may differ from their normal state of consciousness. As one project participant in a different setting described the same effect to me:

It’s just so relaxing, I find it therapeutic – it relaxes me. And you go far away [in your thoughts] it’s like you disappear, and when you come back and see what you’ve made, afterwards you feel really good about it.

(Belinda, in-situ dialogue, participant-observation, UK, 10/2/11)

In the first description above, the practitioner mentions several features of this state of mind and body, which is a “reality in suspense”, well known to artists. They are familiar with the feeling from personal experience, and they have a number of names for it. Amongst the contributors to my research a UK illustrator in my study called it ‘*going into the zone*’ (Talya, GD1, 24/5/10), a Mexican bricolage artist colourfully called it passing ‘*from transcendence to immanency in an instant*’ (Rafael, 10/11/11), and a UK physical theatre practitioner used the expression ‘*when you’re actually in that flow moment*’ (Chris, GD3.2, 19/8/11). The process of arriving in this state is purported to be relatively quick for artists in their own creative process:

I do get lost in the work. Once I start, everything around me has no interest for me. I'm on another level [...] In that moment I'm grabbed by whatever I'm doing.

(‘Rafael’, dialogue, Mexico, 10/11/11)

However this is not an experience arts practitioners can allow themselves in the role of facilitator, when ‘*peak attention*’ (‘Eve’s’ term) is required. Instead, what might be called a “musing” state, which they know from their own experience as artists, is something they seek to open up for participants in a workshop creative process:

A bit of what I was talking about before, moving from transcendence to immanency – it’s also this that I try to achieve in my workshops...

(‘Rafael’, ibid)

A phenomenon bearing striking similarity to this is framed by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as ‘optimal experience’, ‘negentropy’ or in his own conceptualisation: ‘the Flow experience’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, p. 40). In his thesis this state is seen as beneficial because it combines a series of releases – ‘Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant, or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted’ (ibid). He claims that an activity that brings about this state is autotelic, ‘so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they will get out of it, even when it is difficult, or dangerous’ (ibid., p.71). Csikszentmihalyi’s concept is an experience comparable with states achieved in some forms of trance, and he links the idea too with some manifestations of ritual, which will be explored further in Chapter 11.

Having, during participant-observation, witnessed people in what looks like 'Flow' state, (and when allowing an occasional break from focussed absorption of my surroundings as participant observer, having myself occasionally experienced deep absorption in the activity), I believe that arts practitioners are using absorption and 'Flow' as vehicles to propel the creative processes in their workshops.



The act of making something

*I suppose that's what we do, we respond, as human beings we have to. [...]
It's a process of creativity, and 'making something of it' (P)*

[Researcher] *So is that one of your drives then?*

It's one of my drives, definitely. (M)

It is really, that phrase crystallises it all for me [...] – what do you MAKE of it? Of any experience – you have to process it somehow. I think I do that [...] To say – poetry, you know, you're having a bad time – write a poem, you're having a good time – celebrate it, write a poem. Make a mark on a page, paint something, draw something, dance... (P)

(Peter, Mary, GD2, UK, 20/7/10)

During group discussions the subject sometimes turned to the difference between therapeutic approaches – for example the so-called talking therapies – and arts-based practice. The significant difference highlighted by several contributors, drawing reference again to ideas of 'flow' and 'absorption' explored above, was the importance of physically making something:

When people are 'doing', and using their hands, they become more relaxed [...] making things creates that wonderful kind of atmosphere, people aren't really concentrating so much on what they're saying, because they're absorbed in doing.

(Gilly, dialogue, UK, 10/2/11)

There is a strong link evident between this contribution and the previous discussion of 'Flow', which suggests that it may be the (usually) physical act of making something that can trigger a 'Flow'-like state. The act of 'making' is core to the creative process in several ways, as I now go on to outline. One of these, highlighted by many contributors, is here conveyed in a dialogue excerpt about the catalytic aspects of the practice:

One important thing is to make concrete things. This gives an important sense of satisfaction. Many of the kids then start to have better relationships with their parents. If you ask 'why do you want to take it home?'; 'I want to take it home to my folks and say look, something concrete, physical, I made it'. [Parents then say] 'You're working, you're doing something useful, you're making something with your own hands.' It's self-confidence. There's a change. You get favourable opinions from your 'compañeros'. When this starts happening, it changes the kids.

(Alonso', dialogue, Mexico, 14/11/11)

Here the very physicality of a made object is regarded as having its own value – in the story it tells of the hard work, commitment and achievement of the maker. Equally, at the opening to this subsection (in the continuation of a dialogue first cited in Chapter 5), practitioners explore a different function of 'making' as a response, where the term is used both literally and metaphorically. Here the main contributor, Peter (a writer), is exploring two ideas simultaneously – on the one hand he has found a metaphor for the importance he sees in this creative practice. 'What do you make of it?' is usually a question about how

somebody understands something or what sense or meaning they take from it. However he has recast it as literally to make or create something, such as a poem, painting, or dance. He suggests by this that the process of creating something can also become the process of responding to an experience and accommodating or appropriating it. This is his second idea, and echoes the suggestion of the Mexican contributor 'Juan', cited earlier, who was discussing the process of imagining, using the example of the shaman and the bison. The discussion continues with a response from 'Alice', who extends the initial description laterally, using the idea in relation to her own drama-rooted practice. For her, when people '*express their story*' ('Alice', GD2, UK, 20/7/10), by producing their story themselves as an externally created piece of work, they gain a new control or ownership of their experience, which may previously have been oppressive or destructive. In this context a 'story' is referring to a specific experience or someone's lifetime of experience, as well as to the creative story as a work – a piece of art work you make, which others can see, and through which you express yourself.

Story is in itself a creative device, or vehicle, which is obviously central to the practice of artists working in a variety of art forms, (thinking of explicit narratives in film, drama, writing, animation; and implicit or metaphorical narratives in dance, music, visual art and so on). Story or narrative is generally accepted as a fundamental and universal human phenomenon with multiple applications and manifestations, and to find story-making emerging as a central tool amongst these arts practitioners is no surprise. Any process of movement, any journey, including the creative journey in discussion here, is already a story in its own right.

Another practitioner contributes a differently nuanced interpretation of the value of the *making* response, which is the instinct of the artist. He is talking here about a workshop participant who was suffering from problems with his eyes:

I suggested to him to work with the abstract forms that were on his mind, to work with ocular shapes, with irregular shapes, whatever he could imagine. He was already making ordinary shapes, but he could see eye shapes everywhere... 'I'm gonna put this here, and that here and what do you think?', he'd ask. 'The point is', I told him, 'these eye shapes don't let you rest, your head's full of them. So - show them off, exploit them, use them! It might be abstract, but they give you something to talk about.'

(Manuel, dialogue, Mexico, 26/10/11)

This practitioner's instinct, and his advice to his participant collaborator, is to make sense of what he finds alienating by facing it, 'making something of it', and thereby appropriating and using it.

As artists, 'making something' is an instinctive response to life and to experience, and is therefore a device arts practitioners often introduce to propel processes of change or development. It emerges from my data as a creative response with several different potencies as described above, and sits at the very heart of this creative practice. I now turn to explore two final devices, central to creativity and art form expertise, commonly used by practitioners in participatory arts practice: the 'making special' of ordinary spaces, and the things within those spaces; and the use of play and fun as a vehicle for a process.



Making spaces and things ‘special’

In the previous chapter focussing on the spatial framework constructed by arts practitioners, there is discussion of the boundaries which practitioners actively create, to demarcate where “everyday space” ends and the inside of a special space begins. Strategies for this discussed by practitioners include special entry activities and closing activities which act as mini-thresholds to delineate spatial-temporal boundaries, and the transforming of an ordinary space into somewhere extra-ordinary by changing its appearance with colours, lights, spatial arrangements; changing its rules, its smell, sound or other qualities. The term ‘making special’ itself is coined from Ellen Dissanayake’s ethological studies of human artistic activity (Dissanayake, 1980, 1982, 1988, 1995), in which she presents this aspect of creative human behaviour as a strategy for survival and development of the species, a theme which will be explored further later. Such efforts to make spaces ‘special’ can also be played out on the larger scale of a community event, which temporarily transforms the streets, the local school or community facility. This strategy for ‘making special’ is exemplified by the various community parade events referred to at points throughout this thesis – one of which is depicted in figure 8.4 below – and is also seen in the street exhibition of Mexican paper sculptures, ‘alebrijes’ (fig 8.5).



Figure 8.4: 'Roots and Wings' parade (marking the moment of 'transition' for children transferring to High School, transforms the local housing estate into a site of celebration) (UK, July 2010)



Figure 8.5: A city street transformed by giant paper sculptures ('Alebrijes', marking the annual 'Day of the Dead' festival season). (Mexico, October 2011)

The following observations from two of my field experiences in Mexico City capture other similar artist strategies in action, both to transform ordinary spaces, and to give the events which take place within them special significance, using creative devices:

I arrive at the national state cemetery – Museo Panteón San Fernando, where all the Mexican presidents are buried – to help with the final dressing of the cemetery for the 'Day of the Dead'. The cemetery is a small, fenced sanctuary, ordinarily serene and stately, with plaques and tombs bearing the names of the heroic and villainous lead characters of Mexican post-colonial history. But the artists' collective has completely transformed the atmosphere, making numerous life-sized papier mâché sculptures depicting skeletons involved in a bewildering range of activities, which are installed throughout, alongside the graves of the giants of Mexican political history. We also add candles and incense, the heady perfume of which is everywhere around the offerings and altars to the dead. In all corners of the cemetery there are now loosely clothed adult skeletons – cooking, grave digging, playing instruments, kneeling in front of a grave and so on. The flavour of the scenes is consistently ironic, theatrical and satirical, lending the whole cemetery what feels to me a riskily impudent, subversive atmosphere – very gothic. It's very exciting to be useful in the last hours of this project – even this small contribution to the dressing process gives me a huge sense of pride about the quality of the work – I want everyone to see each hidden corner of the cemetery, with all the quirky, candle-lit and flower-strewn scenes. [...] The evening event to open the transformed Pantheon to the public is compered by a giant, thin, transvestite diva wearing red ball gown, huge hat and formidable make-up – he is fantastic, larger than life! (es 'El Loco', says my Mexican friend).

(Field Notes, Mexico, 26/10/11)



Figure 8.6: Pavement art, in the style of Posada's 'Katrina' (c.f. footnote 9)



*Figure 8.7: Skeleton gravediggers work on a fresh grave (at the foot of the podium of a presidential memorial monument).
(Mexico City, Panteón San Fernando, 26/10/11)*



*Figure 8.8: Child skeletons and sheep run amuck and play amongst the gravestones of dignitaries and national heroes.
(Mexico City, Panteón San Fernando, 26/10/11)*

In this first account there is a wholesale and intricate operation by a collective of young artists who are long-term participants (and now collaborators) at a community arts project that is one of my main field sites in Mexico City. They create a specific, altered ambiance in the State Pantheon, in preparation for the celebration of the traditional Mexican 'Day of the Dead'. They use the transformative devices of colour, smell, lights, and altered spatial organisation, as well as the theatrical installation of characters depicting a narrative that challenges and subverts the pomp of the setting. The final impact is certainly special, indeed it is surreal, a quality which grows during the later 'Day of the Dead' celebration event on site. The larger than life, jester-like transvestite called 'el Loco' (the lunatic), is dressed as one of the main *Día de Muertos* traditional characters 'La Katrina'⁹. This is the only day of the year on which ordinary Mexican citizens are permitted into the rarefied Pantheon environment, and this is a special event also attended by current, high level state dignitaries.

The second example is a very different account:

We walk a few steps and are ambushed by a performance, by a group of young people on the pedestrian road bridge. This piece is urban and edgy, young performers – incognito in the crowd – emerge, initially running wooden batons along the iron railings to create a thundering, metallic sound, arresting our attention even above the noise of traffic. After this, long, bright-coloured streamers are dropped from the high level of the stairwell above us – to create a theatre set in the middle of the bustling city street, and the batons start to thump out steady, unified, war-like rhythms as a parade of young dancers in

⁹ 'La Katrina' is a satirical Mexican archetype: a cultural caricature of the 'pretentiousness and vanity of bourgeois women' of early 20th Century Mexico City, depicted as originally created by artist Jose Guadalupe Posada, a female skeleton in full-length dress and flamboyant hat (Arquette, Zocchi, & Vigil, 2008, p. 50)

male/female pairs appears. Dressed in grey and with faces painted as black and white skulls, their dance depicts violence within relationships, expressed as a stylised series of repeated, jarring moves. The ending of this powerful routine comes with the male dancers, moving like zombies step by step, carrying the lifeless bodies of their female partners each to the base of one of the fabric streamers; the female dancers then climb the streamers, performing brilliant, synchronised circus-trapeze twists, spins and holds as they rise. They represent the spirits of young women who have not survived domestic violence situations. The whole effect is captivating: breath-taking and hard-hitting...

(Field Notes, Mexico, 1/11/11)

This is a 'Day of the Dead' processional event through the city. The account depicts an example of a community group of young dancers 'making special' a very unlikely space for their performance, by appropriating a pedestrian road bridge and a busy stretch of city street, in the dark. Their strategy involves the unexpected 'ambush' of their audience of passers-by (the strategy of sudden surprise – the unexpected), using dramatic and threatening sounds (transforming the very ordinary metal railings of their street environment into the drums of battle: a metaphor). These drums mark the beginning of a time in suspense. Then using a second, this time visual ambush, by suddenly and unexpectedly dropping the suspended coloured streamers from a height, they stake out a physical performance area: their stage. They complete the spatial transformation by the performance itself, of a piece of highly dramatic dance theatre, their faces transformed into symbolic death masks. This scene, more contemporary in approach, edgy and less securely bounded than the

Pantheon installation, comments on a current social issue rather than an established socio-political construct.¹⁰

Both these examples clearly demonstrate the use of artistic expression and creative phenomena to imbue the ordinary with a magic of the ‘special’, as well as with the disruption of the ordinary for dramatic effect. The power of creative arts devices of these kinds is universal, found across the globe and throughout history (Schechner, 1974; Turner, 1979, 1982), and theories relating to these phenomena will be explored in the discussion chapter below. These elemental strategies for creating a special space, can be seen being employed by arts practitioners as creative *vehicles* which carry a transformative energy, as I will explore further below.

One final, common generic element of creativity arts practitioners in my study are accessing through their art form expertise, and employing (as seen also in the cemetery event above) as a vehicle for potentiating a process, is playfulness: the ludic (Huizinga, 1970 [1944]), which I now explore.



Use of play and fun

The third room in the gallery is where the group had spent the previous session, with their children. They had been tearing up paper, until they'd made a huge pile on the floor of the gallery, and then swimming in it, in front of the large Hockney compressed paper piece 'Le Plongeur' (the diver). The mums' faces are alive now with the memory of such fun and such irreverence – in an art gallery! Lou [arts

¹⁰ As an example in my study this is slightly different from other participant observations, because my experience described here is that of an audience member rather than sharing experiences with community performers or participants. I had no experience of the workshops leading to the event in which to connect with the young performers and to understand the project experience alongside them, from the inside.

practitioner] says 'we made a lot of noise didn't we?'... [We've still got the paper you know!' she confides later, laughing.]

(Field Notes, UK, 10/7/12)

Playfulness, as described in the excerpt above, is a strategy commonly engaged by practitioners with their groups. The playful mode encompasses a related clutch of behaviours, which includes simply having fun and being cheeky or 'irreverent' as shown here. A group of mothers from a Pakistani community nursery project, which is introducing them and their small children to an art gallery environment, are encouraged to subvert their cautiousness about behaviour norms, and hesitancy to take their own space in this rarefied, lofty cultural environment, by playing: creating a playground in the space.

Another ludic strategy commonly used to break tensions or break through barriers is self-parodying playfulness – the territory of the clown:

Ricci teases the group quite comfortably. He says to them: 'You might wanna just check your hair in that mirror – make sure you look good for the film;' – he goes up to the mirror, flounces his afro a few times and strokes his eyebrow, self-mocking but very confident.

(Field Notes, UK, 30/8/12)

Here the practitioner is working on several levels simultaneously, including playing provocatively with male stereotypes, vanity, masculinity and what is 'cool', to open up, for his group of hyper self-conscious youngsters, spaces for different ways of being young and male. Laughing with each other is one of the most common modes of interaction during participatory arts workshops:

I think creating that laughter, if I've done that in the first five minutes of what I've done, then I know I'm onto a winner. That people are laughing...

(Lou, GD4, UK, 11/10/11)

The value of ‘messaging about’, for example with ideas – as in the field notes describing the animation group reported earlier – is central to creative processes, and when not called ‘messaging about’ may instead be termed ‘experimenting’:

What I say to them is what we’re trying out here is an experiment – and so we’re going to learn together! OK?

(‘Rafael’, dialogue, Mexico, 10/11/11)

All these playful behaviours have their place in suspending a more formal or rigid reality of some kind, and allowing space for a reality with a freer quality, with different possibilities, to emerge (Douglas, 1975). Nonsense, the ludicrous and the language of surreal imaginings was also discussed by practitioners, for example as cited in Chapter 4 exploring intuition, in relation to an activity involving a ‘lucky dip’ word game with children (*Talya, GD2, 23/5/10*). In the example the practitioner highlighted three important creative aspects of playing with nonsense – firstly the fact that people find it funny (which I will discuss later in relation to jokes and ideas about how humour functions), secondly that it can stimulate unlikely new mental images, and thirdly that it challenges the individual to translate metaphorical concepts into visual representations. The same discussion continues with further analysis, a little later, of what is happening through the use of nonsense:

They go into the other side of the brain, they’re stopping rationalising it and they’re stopping putting the barrier up which is themselves telling themselves that they can’t do it. They move onto the right side of the brain. And then they start to operate.

(Mary, GD1, UK, 24/5/10)

This contribution brings in the idea in popular currency that the left hemisphere of people's brains governs their rational, linguistic and linear thinking functions, and that these functions are dominant in many people, overriding the intuitive, non-verbal and conceptual functioning – associated with the right hemisphere. This schema, though contested (Hines, 1991), has many proponents (Harpaz, 1990). Here the interesting inference is that nonsense – the scrambling of logic – can disable a dominance by left-brain function, and release the creative imagination. Continuing the theme, the same dialogue turned to a connection between nonsense and play:

To me that thing about the nonsense is really important too. "Stop making sense" – there's so much within that... (P)

It's play ... freeing up their minds ... (M, T, A)

Which then opens up – once children are sort of in that space, and they're delighting in that play, in that nonsense, that's fertile ground for starting. (P)
(Peter, Mary, 'Alice', GD1, ibid)

The play mode itself is a sophisticated device in the 'playfulness' toolkit, and has been linked with creative and performative behaviours (Huizinga, 1970 [1944]), and analysed in its interrelated development with ritual and with art as human behaviours (Dissanayake, 1974, 1979, 1980, 1982) as will be explored later. Some practitioners commented on the centrality of a habit of play for their entire practice, for example in the following reflection:

If I really think about it (I've not done this before) core to that is tapping into my playing as a child. It's that ability to be back in the playground playing the monkeys or doctors and nurses! And that's what it is. And it's supported

by craft [...] It's like 'let's play together' – we are going to have fun and we're going to play together. BUT that it's really important as well. So it's the combination of fun and meaning. So it's a 'meaningful' playing.

(Heather, dialogue, UK, 9/9/10)

This excerpt draws attention to the importance of purpose within play activity (Dissanayake, 1980) in a project: here a distinction needs to be made between play, and time-wasting, or not being taken seriously. The contributor realises that she is an expert in play, which is at the heart of her theatre practice, and her reflections draw attention to the fact that play in this context is highly charged with purpose, a combination to which she finds young people are very drawn.

The playful mode as device, presented here, is the last of five generic creative methodologies, employed by arts practitioners as *vehicles* for catalysing creative processes in their workshops. These five vehicles are: metaphor; 'Flow'; making things; making spaces and things 'special'; and playfulness. I now turn to the creative journey itself which people engaging in a creative process will make, through the common territories of creativity.



Territories of Creativity

We are going on a discovery trip together, stimulating our perceptions of each other, and of our environment, trying to discover different worlds, and to understand and enlarge the one we have, to reconstruct it. Sometimes we will hit up against strong resistances, the fear of change.

(Cecilia, Email responses from Mexico, March 2012)

The above quote from the research contribution of a puppeteer and theatre director emphasises the analogy of a journey, when discussing the creative processes she undertakes with her groups. For her the path is also a discovery, and she expects also to grow, in the process of a journey of creative collaboration such as this. In response to the direct question 'How then does change happen in your work?' 'Juan', cited at the beginning of this chapter, also talked about 'a movement'. Here too there is a journey of learning indicated. There is movement, and a passage of transit through new territory. In the following reporting I will investigate the different territories of creativity, which practitioners believe are traversed within projects in my study.



Risk, the unknown, chaos

There's a moment (this usually happens in art) there's a moment in theatre when you don't know where to go next. (It's part of the process). What's the way out? What's next? and now? What do we do?

(Guillermo, dialogue, Mexico, 6/11/11)

I think it's unavoidable that we pass through chaos, and crises both personal and within the group, in the face of the great fear of being free to take that jump into the abyss, which is what the creative process always involves. It's important that this process can be fun, that we're pushed by 'not knowing' exactly where we're going and when we'll get there, but that we know that the work can't stop until we succeed.

(Cecilia, email responses from Mexico, March 2012)

I also think that artists are really suitable for [working with change] because we work with risk, with the unknown, particularly with the unknown, with this idea that it's not where you're going but being on the road that counts – particularly if you're participatory, that for me is a real mantra.

(Ruth, Skype dialogue, 3/4/12)

These contributions offer a sense of how intrinsic to creative processes arts practitioners considered venturing into the unknown to be. The middle quote also highlights the courage needed to embrace the creative process, to face embarking on the journey into unknown territory – here described as 'the abyss' – and furthermore it draws our attention to the idea of the 'chaos' of the creative journey, which I will return to below. Already discussed at some length earlier, in relation to its role within intuition, and revisited above when discussing imagination as a highly developed capacity amongst artists, the necessity for *improvisation* returns here once more. Improvisation – described previously as a creative skill – is what is required when plans cannot be used. This time the context is navigating the risky territory of the unknown that creativity entails; 'the unknown' is the natural condition in which improvisation flourishes, as concluded earlier in relation to unforeseen situations in workshops. Differing perspectives on the experience of working within a framework of 'the unknown' are addressed in the following discussion excerpt:

There's a conflict sometimes [with] the people (I mean who are not the creative practitioners) wanting to know exactly what's going to happen, and needing to know 'yeah but how? And what? And who? And when?'. I had an experience recently with teachers in a special school, and there were constant demands about 'But we don't understand, we need to be able to see it! We need to be able to see exactly how it's going to work out.' And we two [arts practitioners], we kept going out of these sessions thinking how bizarre it was, how totally different it was, that we were utterly comfortable with the fact that we had no idea how, or what it was going to look like, except that we knew we were going to get somewhere, we knew that that was going to happen. But we were completely comfortable with the idea that the path wasn't clear. And they were really uncomfortable with that. [General acknowledgement and agreement].

(Chris, GD3.II, UK, 19/8/11)

This contribution describing an unfolding project in a school, together with the third of the initial three excerpts above, indicates a particular confidence and familiarity, indeed an expectation amongst arts practitioners of the necessity to traverse unknown territory, or to work within the haze of indefinite outcomes. The difference in levels of tolerance and *intolerance* for 'the unknown' this practitioner encountered between the artist team and the other professionals in the project (teachers) caused him to reflect on this previously unrecognised characteristic within himself. This reflexive example adds some depth to perspectives explored earlier on intuition, imagination and improvisation, by suggesting that perhaps the very familiarity artists and arts practitioners have with such territories equips them well to work under the conditions of risk, and uncertainty or the unknown, as for example in a process of change. This is also suggested in the third contribution above. Here also, another practitioner made a similar link:

Well I do that all the time with my own practice, I'll start at a point and then I'll just keep working through, if things don't work you chuck 'em out and start... you know. That's how you work through, and eventually something pops out at the end. So you're kind of used to that process.

(Tony, GD5.II, UK, 3/2/12)

In this comment the contributor was comparing the risky experimentation in his own arts practice with the way he works in projects – which is process-led, experimental, problem solving, and accepting that the process is not tidy or predictable. His arts practice experience, Tony maintained, prepares him well for working experimentally with groups. Returning here to the previous group discussion, the dialogue proceeded with Chris and Lou reflecting on a subject often alluded to – that of adrenaline – almost as another creative fuel:

'The excitement of crisis' – that's exactly me, because I find myself - you know everything's all set up, just before the show, and I've got to fiddle with something, and something happens, and suddenly there's the adrenaline rush of the crisis, before, and then the come-down afterwards. Around the moment it somehow needs that rush or something; (C)

It's like you trip yourself up to get yourself in touch... (L)

Yeah, yeyeah, you catch yourself out and then you're on the go. (C)

Because it makes you feel alive... if I'm passive in something, I don't feel alive. It does, it makes you feel in touch, somehow. (L)

When you're actually in that flow moment, performance or something, and something happens and you absorb it and move on with it, it's such a living moment isn't it? (C)

(Chris, Lou, GD3.II, UK, 19/8/12)

This exchange is illuminating in revealing a deliberate compulsion to sabotage circumstances that are smooth, in order to produce ‘the excitement of crisis’ – the rationalisation offered for this behaviour is the need to be in the territory of risk in order to ‘feel alive’. The suggestion is that this state of excitement in crisis may bring out an ability to improvise through crisis, which in itself offers such a sense of achievement or satisfaction (that is otherwise missing) as to be necessary for a complete experience; and indeed this ‘rush’ is experienced as a form of *life force*. Here are echoes of the Trickster character, who tampers with the order of things – usually playfully, for example as the Jester or Fool – and disrupts structure (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975; Douglas, 1975; Linscott Ricketts, 1966). I discuss the relevance to participatory arts practice and practitioners of ideas in the literature relating to the Trickster character, and his companions Jester and Fool, in the theoretical discussion chapter below.

The exchange cited above was not exceptional. All the practitioners in my study indicated that, given the option, they preferred conditions of open-ended (unclear) outcomes, requiring them to work with the unknown. Risk was prized as one of the most valuable experiences through which to grow:

The idea of daring to take a risk, and then realising that you’ve survived it – those tiny processes...

(Ali, dialogue, UK, 11/2/11)

Growth could come both through the confidence risk can instil, and through the creativity it can catalyse. Even the territory of chaos is often expressly welcomed:

We’re in chaos aren’t we, and change comes from chaos and paradigm shifts come from chaos.

(Lou A, GD5.II, UK, 3/2/12)

As indicated here chaos was closely associated with change and with otherwise unattainable possibilities for renewal, or reinvention. Here there are further resonances with the liminal spaces of ritual (Turner, 1969). If the creative process in the projects in my study can be conceptualised as rituals of change (an idea I will discuss in Chapter 9), the arts practitioners in this conceptualisation play the part of the guide in the unknown territories of this liminal space. As Ruth commented:

I am taking the role of a kind of celebrant in a ceremony, or a kind of midwife, or a holder of space

(Ruth, Skype dialogue, 3/4/12).

Exploring territories of creativity highlighted by practitioners as central to their creative processes (both in their own arts practice and in their processes with groups) under the themes of 'the unknown', risk, and chaos, a recurrent theme in practitioners' reflections has been reflection on their own particular role in these territories. Here the question arises – once they have introduced project participants to these uncertain territories, what is the role of the arts practitioner at this stage of the journey?



Navigator in the territory

I think you're like a catalyst or something. It's like being in a thunderstorm or something, and you're there, and you're a conductor, bringing...

[Tony - Holds arm out, high]

[Researcher] *So... you talked about: a storm;*

Yes

[R] *which is a chaos?*

Yes

[R] *And you had your hand out here, and you said 'you're the...,'*

Yes

[R] *and it's almost like you're putting yourself as a stable point in that*

Yes, yes,

[R] *somewhere steady in it, and the way you showed us, if I got it right, was that you are able to... either attract, or direct,*

Yes, yes

[R] *the positive, and ground it, so you give it a place?*

Yes, yes, yes!

You're a lightening rod aren't you!! (L)

[General agreement this is a good metaphor for the role].

(Tony, 'Lester', GD5.II, UK, 3/2/12)

Where practitioner respondents in my study placed themselves in relation to processes in their workshops was consistently ambiguous. As explored previously, practitioners referred often to horizontal power structures in their workshops, and in relation to the other people there with them (the participants), they talked about degrees of friendship, learning from each other, and not wanting to be seen as aloof or special in some way. However in responses

relating to their role in the creative process itself within their workshops, they spoke often – as seen throughout this chapter – about skills and specialist expertise, about devices and mechanisms. As such they were clearly proactive in a process as leaders or galvanisers of some kind, but sought none-the-less to lead from the middle. The metaphor above, built up gradually by one group of highly experienced practitioners using much non-verbal gesticulation and physical embodiment of an image in mind, encapsulates the ambiguity of this role. It juxtaposes energetic charge with calming steadiness, by including the images of both a ‘catalyst’ and a stabilising point – this latter by drawing on the idea of the calm at the centre of the storm. Thus the image combines both dynamism and stability in an intriguing duality, set amidst chaos (the storm), which might include emotional, physical (health), political or environmental chaos factors depending on the project. The final metaphor arrived at, that of a lightning conductor, or ‘lightning rod’ achieves a portrayal of duality very well, and conveys a very practical function – an object with a job to do.

The process of channelling, or ‘conducting’ or ‘directing’ as coined above, recalls the notion of the guide in the conceptualisation of a ritual process. This function was usually termed ‘facilitation’ in workshops, and uses both the stabilising and the dynamic qualities of the ‘lightening rod’ to facilitate creative experiences, as part of the journey in the territory of creativity. This facilitation of a group in their passage through territories of creativity is an aspect of the practice explored below by a different group of practitioners.

There's these ritual, magic moments that happen in drama-making sometimes... I don't know if I'd use the word 'flow', but there's definitely a kind of - where everybody is entirely – it kind of sends a shiver down my spine as I talk about it, I can feel it!

(‘Alice’, GD3.II, UK, 19/8/12)

The description here which begins a longer research contribution by drama and movement practitioner 'Alice', captures very powerfully the experience of 'communitas' (Turner, 1969, 1974), a phenomenon which Turner described as a 'blend [...] of homogeneity and comradeship. We are presented [...] with a "moment in and out of time," and in and out of secular and social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond' (2002, p. 360). The link to the intense sharing experience of 'communitas' is reinforced in the comments from Lou, another contributor to the same discussion:

The most powerful moments like that [...] In a way I kind of wonder if that's something that goes so deep – the kind of humanity-sharing thing. [...] that would be the strongest kind of feeling.... That for me is very profound, because it's about – it is, it's about being part of humanity.

(Lou GD3.II, ibid)

Below Ruth chooses a different approach to articulating this same phenomenon in her research dialogue:

...the thing that happens when a group of people are brought together in a moment of 'communitas', or ritual, which I think is what theatre is. If I look at all the participatory work that I create, there's often moments of 'heart opening', or a space where something just kind of steps out of time a bit. Or a really tight container is put round something to say 'in here, in this space, we can be something. Something can happen here between us.' That's a kind of alchemy. That's where the potency of change happens.

(Ruth, dialogue, UK, 3/4/12)

This description combines a theoretical framing of the magic (alchemical) moment as 'communitas', with the aspiration of the potential it holds for change – a reference again to the 'potency and potentiality' Turner attributes to

liminality (Turner, 1979, pp. 465-466). In the brief extract below from participant observation a hint of 'communitas' is captured, in the moments before a community lanterns parade sets off, on a cold February night:

The crowd is quiet and waiting, breath puffing white in the air while the taper is poked carefully through the small door to touch the candle wicks – and then the handing of the scissors to the mayor by a small child, so he can cut the ribbon. The scissors are decorated with skeins of tinsel (no chance at underlining the celebratory nature of the event is missed).

(Field notes, UK, 4/2/12)

Captured here is a threshold moment, at a ritual-based event. Turner sees the power of such moments as based in their 'liminoid' quality, another idea explored in the later discussion. The moment of pause, in which 450 community members, half of them aged between 1 and 11, are silent, is full of 'potency and potentiality'. The snapshot also picks out the scissors 'made special' with 'skeins of tinsel' in a way that arts practitioners know, in its small way, will add power to the moment (Dissanayake, 1980, 1988).



Creating a crucible for change

In relation to those big moments, isn't it that, running a session, setting it up, not always knowing what the outcome is going to be, or what really is going to happen, but you're putting the things in place, and there is a kind of goal; and then the middle section somehow is the playground time, so you're not quite sure; and then you shuffle it around, and put things together a little bit, or you take - or 'I'll put those things together, see what happens', you know – so its trying to get that feeling isn't it, in the participants' experience, so you're trying to give the starting place and the

structure, and the surroundings and the support; But also to have the room, and the – maybe the pressure, or the deadline or whatever other things may be needed to let whatever that creative moment is emerge .

(Chris, GD3.II, UK, 19/8/11)

In the previous discussion experiences were cited which had created an intense moment of shared experience. Drawing on the contribution from a different practitioner, Chris, above, I focus briefly on how practitioners may be bringing together the different conditions they need in order to achieve a moment as powerful as those described before, during their creative journey with participants.

Here the description focuses on the larger-scale facilitation process, and could apply to the shaping of a whole project over a long period of time, or the shape of a single workshop. In this reflection on his own practice Chris highlights conditions he tries to build in to the experience. The first of these is the balance between a certain purposefulness and an openness: not confined to a specific or closed goal. The next element is the introduction of the freedom to play: *'the playground time'* – an analogy with children's play inside a contained space. There is an element of uncertainty on his own part, and experimentation with different ideas. These are his own interventions as facilitator, improvised based on experimentation and observation to achieve the best stimulus for something to *'happen'*. He lists the cocktail of different elements: these are a starting place, a structure, *'surroundings and support'* (referring to the spatial and relational frameworks, seen in Chapters 6 and 7), and some freedom to play within that. Finally he adds one more element: *'the pressure, or the deadline'*, marking that something with intensifying properties is a necessary component for catalysing *'that moment'*. This intensifying element

echoes the exploration above of the '*excitement of crisis*', and of risk, as catalytic forces harnessed by arts practitioners to intensify project experiences. Chris suggests that these are conditions needed to '*let that creative moment emerge*' – the description of a crucible for change.

It is certainly the case that creative processes and projects unfold in infinitely different ways, and that no single sequence or formula can capture the diversity even of the 'moments' witnessed in the projects in my study. Sometimes there is no single moment of *communitas*, but a sustained, shared momentum of purpose over weeks or months, for example in Tony's workshops punctuated by cups of tea, described earlier. Often, too, there are powerful moments which occur in the stillness of quiet reflection, such as described in the poignant scene between Mary and the Sri Lankan family. Secondary processes of reflectiveness, which can be set in motion during the creative journey itself, constitute a further phenomenon emerging as a key element of the transformative experience in this work. Using for this theme the metaphor of *views* of the landscapes, glimpsed en route, such processes are now explored.



Landscape Views

Creating spaces which allow reflection

In the playground I met an older girl, Hayley, here to support her sister in year 3 who had made a lantern this year. Hayley herself had been in the second ever year group to participate in the year 6 Carnival project 'Roots and Wings' before she left to go to high school, and she's now 16. Tall, slim and quietly spoken she started talking to me, a complete stranger, while we were standing in the playground in the dark. We were surrounded by a fairy tale feast of candle-lit lantern structures, nestling in clusters of two or three throughout the school grounds like little fairy grottos. Small children were tearing about the lantern landscape, highly excited, or giddily following the maze-like trails, marked out between the lantern clusters using brown paper bags weighted with sand and lit up by night lights. These youngsters were minimally overseen by mums, doing 'the tour', toddlers in pushchairs and smart phones on hand to take pictures. [...] Hayley said it brought back so many memories, being at 'Lanternland': she was basking in it, gazing around her. She said it was almost too much, made her want to cry. She was almost beyond able to speak. Gradually she talked about how incredibly powerful it had been to take the Carnival parade up to the high school that day in year 6. She said it had made a huge difference to how she felt about starting there the following September. It was obviously a visceral memory. She appeared overwhelmed with memories, she kept saying 'I can't believe it, I can't believe it.' It seemed to me that she was going through one of those points of reckoning, of so many moments, and choices and decisions. She was reflecting on all the things she'd done, all the changes since that time at this school, apparently processing all this stuff, right in front of me. She was talking about how her boyfriend wants her to have a baby and she doesn't want to have one yet, and how he's in the army... I was really just an

audience for it all. She expressed deep nostalgia for her time here at 'Chick', this experience bringing back a whole feast of images in her mind. She was talking about pressures, and about now nearly being an adult... pouring out all these things, and it was the lanterns event that was bringing them back to her.

There was a very emotional moment when she spotted [artist] Mary for the first time since then. (I wanted to find one of the other arts practitioners for her too, but her emotions made her very shy). She told me how important it had been for her sister (7) to come to the 'Lanternland' event this year. Millie was 'badgering and badgering me all week to say I would come with her. I nearly didn't, because I've got loads of homework to do, but I just thought - oh I'll come.' The reality of being here had taken her completely by surprise in its obvious potency.

(Field notes, UK, 17/3/11)

Through the intense experiences of some participatory arts projects, such as the 'magic moments' described by 'Alice' above, and through the slower, committed progression of others represented elsewhere in this study, practitioners reported observing secondary processes, stimulated by creative experiences in their projects. These might be cited by commentators – particularly arts advocates – as clear outcomes of the process, however to claim them as such is extremely complex, due to their entanglement with the mass of concurrent influences and developmental processes in people's lives. Here I explore my findings relating to any such secondary processes simply as phenomena observed, or experiences described, which contributors believed had been originally stimulated during their participatory projects.

The excerpt above describes an encounter I had, which made me a witness to a heartfelt response from a teenager to a community lanterns event. Visiting this event unexpectedly connected her in a very immediate way to a previous experience as a long-term participant in a community arts project. The impact for her, in that moment of being in the playground, was the triggering of

a helter-skelter of personal reflection, incongruously shared with a stranger (me) and infused with a mixture of strong emotions. Almost a year prior to this encounter, I had facilitated a group discussion in which the same arts practitioner Mary, whom Hayley was so emotional to see again, had reflected on the possible effects on people of participating in such projects:

There's one metaphor that comes to me quite a lot, and it's to do with the space you're in: it's about there being a window to a view you've never seen before. I think sometimes they [participants] don't see the view while they're in the space with you. I think – you don't know – but at some point maybe years hence they might be walking in another metaphorical space, and notice that window, and look out and go 'oh, that's it!' and get it, the recognition of it. And I think it is about views of yourself and of others, and of the world you live in. And about seeing it differently. So... it's like creating a window in a wall.

(Mary, GD1, UK, 23/5/10)

Such an experience of “revisiting to review” was authentically embodied by Hayley. The teenager overtaken by realising that she now saw the ‘*view from the window*’, and recognised its precious value; not only for herself as a younger child, but also for her younger sister, currently involved. Furthermore, this sudden ‘*noticing*’ of ‘*the view*’ also triggered a reviewing of her life-path since, reflecting on herself and her decisions in a new light – ‘*seeing it differently*’.

Similarly, a Mexican drama practitioner commented on changes he had witnessed project participants making in their lives, such as the women who suddenly decided to leave their violent husbands, or the truanting teenagers who decided to return to school. The following excerpt shows him reflecting on where he felt such change might be originating:

Maybe it's through this - these stories - that each participant comes to take stock of where they're at. 'I've spoken about myself for the very first time', or for the second or third time, and what has emerged is... I tell them – 'it's ok! it'll do you good! to breathe air into this part: understand it'. Because it's important that each person speaks about their issues, their battles, about their difficulties and anger, it's necessary to talk about these things - in life. My own story.

(Guillermo, dialogue, Mexico, 7/11/11)

Here the idea is that people see and feel their own life struggles through a different filter: if they can re-create their story outside of themselves – in drama form with a group – they can experience it from different angles to gain new perspectives. This is similar to the playground encounter example with Hayley, in its use of distance (there, distance in time; here, in the objectifying of personal experience) to enable reflection (Boal, 1979 [1974]; Schechner, 1974, 1987). In considering how the practice of her theatre company with vulnerable young people differs from the practice of members of the caring professions with whom she works closely, and whom she greatly respects, another practitioner gave the following response:

Probably everything that they do is based in reality, whereas we say that everything we do is absolutely based in using art as a filter for that reality, so we are thinking about feelings and motivation, and looking for solutions and different ways of being; but we're doing it from the perspective of looking from the outside in, as opposed to looking from the inside out.

(Heather, dialogue, UK, 9/9/10)

This exploratory reflection refers to her own approach to facilitating developmental change with troubled young people, which requires that she works with an individual's or a group of individuals' own experiences, and builds

a drama piece from them, to 'look from the outside in' at their emotional world.

She explains:

When we're working with young people we are helping them create stories, whether that's about their own lives or whether it's completely imaginative – although they're absolutely informed by their own lives of course, but we do it through character and scenario so they don't have to disclose.

(Heather, ibid)

'The outside' is here arrived at through the separation process of creating an imaginary, distilled representation of the real, in order to look at it from a distance (c.f. Boal, 1979 [1974]; Schechner, 1974, 1987). This theatre practitioner suggests that the medical and health practitioners, on the other hand, seem from her perspective to try to accompany the young person into their internal world, in order to see it with them, understand it, and then try to help them to look outside from that position. Later she adds the following:

I think it [the workshop] is where a means for change to happen takes place. But I think then the change probably happens in the reflection, if you see what I mean. So the ideas are generated through that [the workshop and theatre activities] but then the actual thought process that might make that change happen has to be based in reality and in the reflection I think. Its like, [...] the art is the method by which the thought processes can change, [...] So if you're creating something, you're creating something for other people or yourself to look at from the outside, I think. [Contributor's original emphasis]

(Heather, dialogue, UK, 9/9/10)

This is a complicated response in which Heather proposes a two-step-process for achieving change as a result of participating in the theatre processes she uses. Drawing for her practice on the ideas of Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal (1979 [1974]) she suggests that while fully immersed in

the theatre process participants are less likely to realise changes, and that changes themselves need a further step – that of reflection on what messages are contained in the theatre experience, in order to enact changes in their real world or real lives. When asked: *‘Do you think that that change could happen without that creative process, without that workshop space?’* the practitioner’s response was confident:

No I don’t, I believe that you need that process absolutely. And whether that’s conscious or subconscious for the participant [...] It’s the doing of it [...] obviously by creating the theatre they’re able to step back and have a look, and see things; they’re able to rehearse things in a safe environment, so that, actually, that can change behaviour later on.

(Heather, ibid)

Practitioners across my study considered ‘reflective practice’ – or the practice of reflecting – as a valuable if not essential activity. The previously-mentioned common attribute amongst artists that they seek perfection, and continually refine and rework their products, includes also habits of reflective practice, built in through art form training or else a personal response to the making process. The suggestion is made by Heather in a previous contribution, discussing values and ethical practice in Chapter 5, that reflection is essential for any ‘responsible theatre maker’. Several practitioners working in a variety of art form areas – dance, visual art, performance, and video as well as theatre, as here – described a group reflection process as one of their essential closing rituals in workshops.

The other idea mentioned in the contributions above discussing drama is that of rehearsing new ways of behaving or being. This process is not limited to the drama context. Below a visual arts practitioner refers to a similar idea:

I think it's practicing ways of working and ways of thinking. You're trying out relationships, relationships with other people in the group, your own relationship with yourself, if that doesn't sound too mixed up... the way that you perceive yourself. And you're challenged. Not to the degree where they don't want to come any more, but to a degree where they can start rethinking that picture of themselves.

(Amy, dialogue, UK, 16/12/11)

This is a contribution relating to the twice-weekly workshops she facilitates with a group of mums and toddlers, in a project initiated to encourage improved familial relationships between mothers and their young children, through creative arts. The suggestion here is that the space provided by the workshop, carefully constructed and managed by the arts practitioner, offers through the medium of creative methodologies (metaphor, Flow, playfulness and others) the chance to reflect, begin changing the self-image, and rehearse new behaviours in a supported environment. This echoes the theme explored by Ruth earlier, considering the notion of creating spaces for '*micro-utopias*', which are lived for a few hours in the workshop each week, in order to develop new ways of being when back in everyday life.

The secondary processes that practitioners discuss in the above examples, which they suggest can be triggered by the participatory arts experiences they facilitate, consist in people reflecting on themselves and their situation from a different perspective and with new questions. The mechanisms that can bring about such reflection are located in the whole practice assemblage: the creation of spaces (both physical and metaphorical) with

appropriate qualities, that in turn, supported by strong and trusting relationships, provide new opportunities and encourage greater ownership by participants of their situation, responses, decisions, and their future.

Concluding summary of the 'Creative Key'

In this lengthy chapter I have reported a conceptualisation of the sixth, and central element in the practice assemblage, that which most clearly marks this practice out as one specific to artists, which is drawing on their creative expertise. Rather than examining how creativity is interpreted through the diverse art forms of the numerous practitioners in the study, taking a step further back this is a description of the role of creativity itself, in participatory arts initiatives. Structuring the reporting in four sections I have outlined how practitioners were using their creative competencies as stimuli; introducing creative mechanisms and devices within activities; accessing territories common to creative processes; and through creative experiences triggering reflection, enabling participants to discover new or transformed perspectives on their situation. I will now recap each of these sections.

The intrinsic creative stimuli brought by arts practitioner to the process, presented here as 'fuels', included intense engagement of the imagination; attention to artistic quality in the process and its products; and accessing via the artist themselves a quality of difference, or 'otherness', and other worlds.

The generic creative devices and mechanisms, presented here as 'vehicles', included: metaphor; absorption and what Csikszentmihalyi has conceptualised as 'the Flow experience' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, p. 40); creating something new – often collaboratively; 'making special' (Dissanayake,

1980) to heighten the significance and enjoyment of experiences; the subversive mode of playfulness, including laughter, and nonsense as a mode, and accessing a collaborative world of play.

In the third section I reported findings on the creative territories which the study found projects commonly passing through, including risk and the unknown, with even the territory of chaos often expressly welcomed. I introduced the idea of arts practitioners acting as guides through these territories, using their facilitation skills to create shared moments of surrender to the group, or 'communitas' (Turner, 1979), and finally in the fourth section, framed as 'views of the landscape' I showed how practitioners use creative processes to open up spaces for reflection, which can enable participants to contemplate making changes in their own lives or perspectives.

Thus the *Creative Key* is depicted as an extremely complex and subtle, catalytic element of the practice studied, forming the sixth part of my mid-level theory of a shared participatory arts 'practice assemblage' of six elements. With a detailed exposition of this theory having been offered through the last five reporting chapters, I now add a brief recap of the entire assemblage in the following coda to Part Two of the thesis.

Part Two Coda

Reprising the Participatory Arts Practice Assemblage

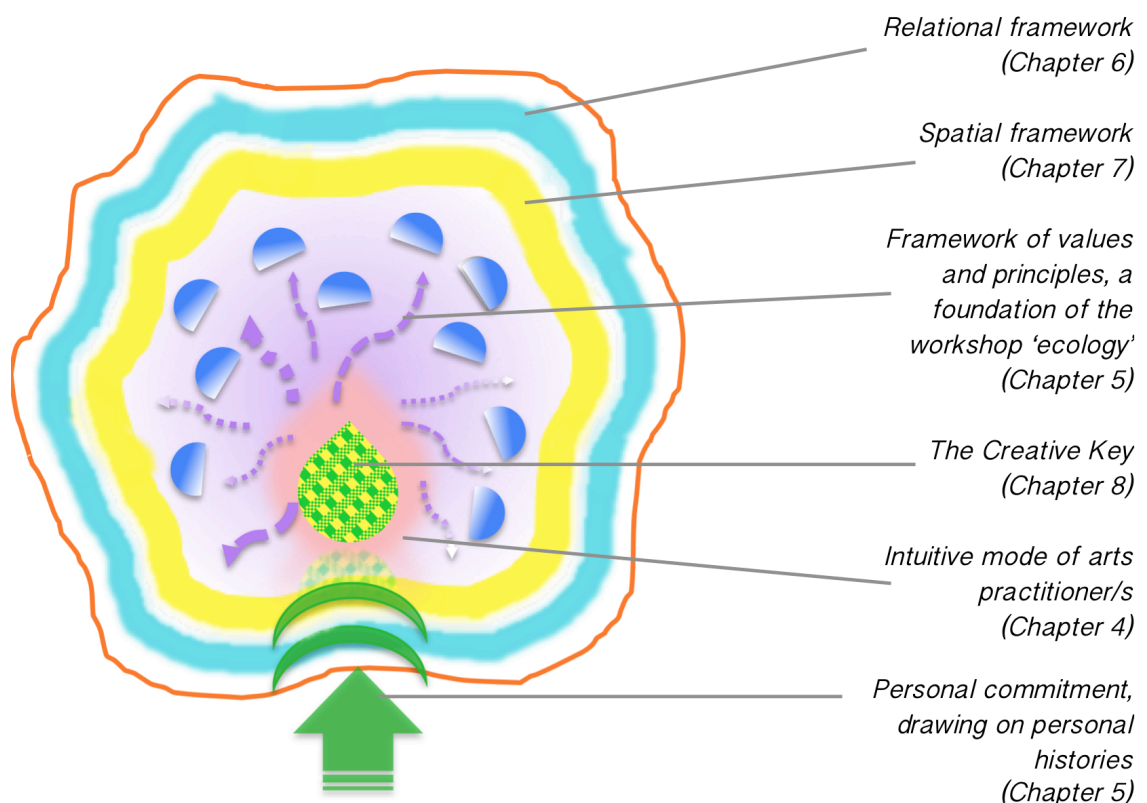
The introductory preamble to Part Two of this thesis presented a visual conceptualisation of my mid-level theory, the community-based participatory arts practice assemblage. Following the five reporting chapters, comprising detailed examples (from my data) through which to explore the elements of this complex and multi-layered approach, in this coda I recapitulate the diagrammatic representation introduced in the preamble, and reprise a summary of the assemblage.

Intuition (element one) is indicated here by a fuzz representing the “charge” of ‘peak attention’ surrounding the practitioner/s; it includes the suggestion of a reflection to symbolise the reflective, imaginative aspects of intuitive practice, and the way in which these practitioners draw on their prior experience to feed their intuitive responses.

The second element of the assemblage is the importance of arts practitioners’ individual values and principles, as motivations for becoming involved and remaining involved in this work, indicating that this is a practice of

commitment. This element of the assemblage draws on practitioners' personal histories, and is here depicted as a force (green arrow from below, with pulses). The direction of this element is shown as a dynamic, which carries through into the ecology of the practice environment itself, and manifests in the character of their practice. The pulses also indicate that practitioners cite as other key motivating factors the connections and collaborations with people participating in the workshops, and the gentle or radical transformations for participants witnessed during workshop sessions. Thus motivations and commitment to the work come from both outside and inside the workshop ecology.

Figure 'coda1' : Depicting the entire practice assemblage of six elements



The framework of principles and values (element three of the assemblage) that practitioners seek to weave into the workshop environment is depicted as a foundation colour (purple) with purple arrows to show the spread of this way of being, throughout the project space. The arrows should be seen as in fluid movement, to indicate the continual work on these values; since this is a constant process throughout all sessions, and practitioners aim for it to become the mode of collaborative coexistence of all those sharing the experience in the space.

The relational framework (element four), shown as a broad, blue enclosure, is the framework of highly positive and trusting relationships between practitioners and each workshop participant, fostered as an important social element of the practice. The relational framework is necessarily continually being co-constructed and reworked, with constant attention to the detail of interactions between people, and therefore it should be understood to be fluid and dynamic, like a force-field, and is depicted in the diagram below as if a moat, surrounding the workshop activity. It is within this framework – and only when this framework is created – that practitioners believe the transformative creative activity they seek to engage in with project participants, can be effective.

The spatial framework, (the fifth element, and the third of three qualitative frameworks attended to constantly by practitioners) is a protected but liberating space that arts practitioners construct, in order to facilitate challenge and experimentation. Here shown as the yellow, inner enclosure of the space, like the relational and values frameworks, the multidimensional spatial framework is necessarily continually being co-constructed and reworked, with constant attention to the detail of how the ‘dynamic affective atmosphere’ of

the workshop is functioning for participants. The spatial framework should therefore be understood to be fluid and dynamic, surrounding or 'holding' the space as described by one respondent, and containing the workshop activity.

The sixth and final element of the assemblage, indicated (though not depicted separately) in the diagram above by a vibrant texture within the symbol of the practitioners (green teardrop), is the *Creative Key*. This element, embodied in the arts practitioners and their skills, is central to the practice assemblage, and is what marks this out as an arts-based practice. Alongside arts activity, aspects of the creative key include generic creative processes, which work towards change or can facilitate transformative experiences. As reported in Chapter 8, the *Creative Key* as a concept is complex, comprising several elements in its own right; which my findings suggested characterised the creative components of this work as a process or journey of change.

At figure coda 1 above, then, the entire practice assemblage of six elements is shown in a single diagram, producing the organic workshop 'ecology' of interacting elements. All these elements interact with each other, forming this dynamic workshop 'ecology'.

Based on my in-depth ethnographic research, Part Two has described and analysed the 'practice assemblage' as a coherent methodology of community-based participatory arts practice. Having reprised a diagrammatic articulation of this mid-level theory, I now move on to Part Three of the Thesis. As previously noted, little of the extant academic literature on community arts and health or participatory art practice reaches further than descriptive reporting of activities, whilst assessing evidence of their outcomes in relation to project aims. To

explore outcomes without understanding the mechanisms whereby such outcomes may be achieved, I propose, leaves discourses within the field exposed (Raw et al., 2012). My aim in this study was to take a further step, and after developing a reliable characterisation of practitioners' common approaches I sought a theorisation of my findings, which now follows as Part Three of the thesis: 'Discursive Fields'.

Part Three:

Discursive Fields

Chapter 9

Introducing Theoretical Perspectives

In proposing a mid-level theory of significant complexity, as encapsulated in the practice assemblage in Part Two, I have set myself an immense challenge: of building a theoretical understanding of a phenomenon which is truly interdisciplinary, and multidimensional. An interdisciplinary research approach opens up a multitude of theoretical avenues and paradigms for deepening understanding of the research subject, and in this project I have had to make choices, leaving other avenues for other occasions. The challenge of theorising the practice assemblage is a task which far exceeds the scope of this thesis, and what I present in Part Three is a very first step in a much longer exploration.

The interdisciplinary nature of the practice renders a grasp of how the assemblage works elusive, particularly when the focus moves from concrete findings into more abstract ideas. I am very wary of resorting to a reductionist framing, limiting rather than deepening understanding at this stage. An open, responsive approach, seeking an edifying analysis of what is an ultimately plural, eclectic human response by individuals in a multitude of different situations, has been in constant tension with the unifying aim of seeking an

overall characterisation that could be valuable to the field. This tension continues into this next stage, of building a theoretical articulation. Throughout the process I have sought refuge in an 'ethos of eclecticism', and respect for individual interpretations and expressions by each practitioner of the unified practice assemblage (Rapport & Overing, 2007, pp. 279-283). At this final stage I am still striving to hold the plural and the singular in healthy tension, and have chosen to work with a range of theoretical approaches which themselves embrace ambiguity, to find a meaningful interdisciplinary articulation worthy of the complexity of the phenomenon.

The participatory arts practice assemblage is a phenomenon I have observed and described as a 'dynamic ecology'; it has a fluid coherence and an integrity, which I have attempted to articulate throughout the previous chapters. However, in describing something so organic it is easy to under-emphasise specific agents within the whole. At this stage, in an aspect which distinguishes my ideas from the anti-humanist analysis of Fox, in his 'Deleuze-inspired analysis to supply the theoretical framework for creativity and health' (Fox, 2012, p. 1), I want to highlight the specific agency not just of creativity as a process, as analysed by Fox, but of the individual arts practitioner within the process. This is an element I have threaded implicitly through the characterisation of the practice, but have not yet distinguished explicitly enough to match the importance of its specific contribution, as established by my study. In the discussion chapter that follows, building on ideas first introduced in Chapter 8, I have chosen a theoretical approach that conveys core aspects of the agency of the arts practitioner, as the fundamental dynamic catalyst within the assemblage. I present ideas on these aspects using theories on the extraordinary qualities of the Trickster, the Jester or Fool. Beginning with reflections

on marginality in relation to the Trickster, I then introduce to this strand a cluster of theories exploring qualities of space, relationships and creativity, to match the main emphases of the practice assemblage as it is activated by arts practitioners, and I finally combine these to create a framing of the practice.

The further theories I use, already touched upon in the analysis of the use of space in Chapter 7, draw on the field of secular ritual, incorporating strands on play, arts practices, performance and meaning making, incorporating all these within a concept of change processes. Ritual is a wide field; as cautioned here by Richard Schechner:

Even to say it in one word, ritual, is asking for trouble. Ritual has become so variously defined – as concept, praxis, process, ideology, yearning, religious experience, function – that it means very little because it can mean too much. (1987, p. 10)

Here I engage with ritual mainly as process, and while drawing on other thinkers, my main guide through the territory of secular ritual is Victor Turner. The discussion uses his key themes of 'liminal' and 'liminoid' spaces, and 'communitas' – a quality of human interrelating, which he sees as offering dynamic potential. I combine with Turner's ideas Ellen Dissanayake's concept of 'making special' (1988, pp. 74-106), which associates the origins of art-making, play and ritual as interrelated, ethologically grounded human behaviours:

One might view the three behaviours – art, play, and ritual – as aspects of a single behavioural complex based on the recognition and "manufacture" of specialness. (Dissanayake, 1982, p. 149)

Csikszentmihalyi's 'Flow' theory and Winnicott's 'potential space' of play help to underpin thinking on other catalytic experiences described in the assemblage, to

arrive at a concept of creativity as a change process, initiated and facilitated by the arts practitioner as creative Trickster, or Jester figure.

Marginality: The Capital of the Outsider

Contributors to this study brought together a diverse composite image of the persona of the arts practitioner in this work and in these settings. As explored in the earlier chapter on the *creative key*, differences are apparent between these individuals and their host groups – they are not of the group, rarely of the community, and have already trodden an unconventional path in their life simply by becoming an artist. This at an elementary level sets them apart as ‘other’. My interest here is in the quality of marginality they bring to their work, through embodying facets of difference from the mainstream, in their ‘artist-ness’ if not in other ways. Building on my initial reflections on this with reference to the example of ‘Lance’, the break-dancer, introduced in reporting section *The power of difference* in the *Creative Key*, Chapter 8 above, I want to explore further the impact that the “otherness” of arts practitioners has within the context of their work, through use of relevant literature on archetypal outsiders.

Georg Simmel (1971 [1908]) discusses repercussions of the duality of marginal status by focussing on the eternal presence of ‘the stranger’ in any society or community, and the ambiguity of the role. Considering the stranger in the guise of visiting trader, he looks at the ambiguity of the remote and the near encapsulated in this figure. His argument raises themes that resonate with my

findings on the variety of roles given to arts practitioners by project groups; and these themes lend support to my analysis of the arts practitioner as marginal figure, who holds specific privileges associated with this marginality. Firstly Simmel discusses the stranger considered an enemy within, or 'inner enemy', 'whose membership within the group involves both being outside it and confronting it' (Simmel, 1971 [1908], p. 143). This echoes arts practitioners in my study seen as challenging systems, as described by 'Liliana' discussing the 'rebel' construct of the artist. He then characterises the stranger as trader who, originating from elsewhere, offers the potential for importing and trading in new ideas and expanding horizons. This resonates with arts practitioners' capacity for raising curiosity as conveyors of the new and strange, demonstrated in my study for example by artist Lou with a project group of Pakistani Muslim women, reported in the chapter on spatial frameworks. Simmel further discusses the perceived impartiality of the stranger, whose absence of allegiance to any faction within a group offers them a very versatile position, able to carry the kudos of negotiator, and hence arbiter of others within the group. This scenario is exemplified in my study by arts practitioners arbitrating in situations of community dispute – a role required in several cases where racial prejudice and disrespect threatened projects. Finally, Simmel's depiction of the stranger as one likely to move on, (this a status which paradoxically attracts openness and trust), describes the transitory insider/outsider often receiving 'the most surprising revelations and confidences, at times reminiscent of a confessional, about matters which are kept carefully hidden from everybody with whom one is close' (Simmel, 1971 [1908], pp. 144-145). Such cases were commonplace in my study, with individual arts practitioners becoming the trusted 'friend', support and confident to numerous project participants, children and adults alike. These

examples of Simmel's perennial insider/outsider qualities serve to highlight the complex, marginal 'stranger' role in which arts practitioners are cast, and to vindicate further analysis of the significance of marginality, as an attribute which may have particular traction in this work.

Fools, Jesters, Tricksters: duality and marginality

Some arts practitioners were familiar with an analogy of the artist as 'fool' or 'jester', and the subject arose fleetingly in discussions, with unresolved verdict about whether the comparison was a good or bad thing. The archetypal outsider – the character of the Fool – is known by alternative names including the Jester, who performs the role for audiences, often with demonstrably creative skills as a minstrel (musician) or 'player' (actor). Closely aligned also with aspects of the Trickster (familiar for its inclusion as an archetype of Jung's collective unconscious (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991)), the character is known to be both temporally and geographically ubiquitous, with variants recorded across all continents and first appearing thousands of years ago (Jung, 1990; Otto, 2001). With such widespread manifestations of this character, variations in interpretation are also inevitable; however several core elements of the archetype are recurrent, and useful here. Commonly discussed Jester, Fool and Trickster characteristics include humour, playfulness or foolishness combined with wisdom (considered) and insight (intuitive), and a disregard for conventions and laws, including social status. The latter is an aspect born out in Shakespeare's well-known depiction of the ragged fool whispering in the ear of the King in *Lear*; while the considered wit is a feature of his best known 'motley fool' Touchstone, in *As You Like It* (Warde, 1915).

Some traditional folkloric descriptions of the Trickster – for example the Coyote or Raven myths emanating from North American mythology – include the morally contradictory qualities: of cultural hero alongside cunning rogue. Linscott Ricketts reconciles these two sides as ‘creative transformer of the world and the heroic bringer of culture.’ His ‘trickster-transformer-culture hero (or “trickster-fixer,” for short)’ is a figure who ‘cannot be extirpated from the affections of the people – for everywhere he is an immensely popular character’ (Linscott Ricketts, 1966, pp. 327-328). Franz Boas writing in 1891 emphasised egotistical, amoral qualities as the dominant aspect in some Trickster traditions (Boas, cited Linscott Ricketts, p. 329), an interpretation that would render the Trickster a mal-fitting characterisation for the constructive community arts practitioners of my study. However Linscott Ricketts contests this perspective as more hypothetical than factually grounded. He asserts the saliency of duality itself as a key feature of the figure, and one with significance of its own. For Linscott Ricketts, as for Babcock-Abrahams in her later analysis (Linscott Ricketts, 1966, pp. 327-328), the Trickster archetype, because of his paradoxical ambiguity, has stood and stands central to the very development of complex human understandings of reality.

To recap thus far, encapsulated within concepts of the marginal figure I have drawn together the following attributes: an “otherness” quality; an outsider status which offers certain advantages; a moral complexity and duality; intuitiveness; playfulness and a role as the entertainer; and habitation of a position or place beyond standard structures of social status. As I move on I will explore how these themes inform an analysis of my findings on the multivalent

role of the arts practitioner, and I begin with a focus on the last two attributes above: liminal qualities of marginality, and the playful disruptiveness of humour.

A liminal figure

Babcock-Abrahams points out the enduring allure, attested by anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Edmund Leach, of figures who remains ‘*between* categories’, as do the Trickster, Fool and Jester. Babcock-Abrahams, like Simmel, is interested in concepts of marginality, and the kinds of power this may give people adopting or given the role of outsider:

At the center of his antinomian existence is the power derived from his ability to live interstitially, to confuse and to escape the structures of society and the order of cultural things. [...] More importantly, trickster expresses the ambiguous and paradoxical nature of power so derived. While trickster’s power endows his group with vitality and other boons, it also carries the threat and the possibility of chaos.¹¹ (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975, p. 148)

To contemporize the many-faceted, mythical Trickster figure, Babcock-Abrahams introduces Hobsbawm’s ‘social bandit’, as a modern, realworld manifestation of the Trickster / outsider: the ‘social bandit’ is a real person, operating in everyday life, ‘combating the oppression of authority to protect the existence of a peasant group’ (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975, p. 151). With reference to my study this interpretation resonates clearly with the motivations for work described by several of the Mexican practitioner respondents, reported

¹¹ I return later to the significance of ‘chaos’, previously cited by practitioners in Chapter 8 as a productive and positive aspect of the creative processes they use. See also footnotes 12 and 13.

in Chapter 10 on transnational perspectives below. Another somewhat lighter characterisation of the Fool-as-outsider chimes with the narratives of many in my study, for which the following analysis from Welsford's text *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*, cited by Babcock-Abrahams is illuminating:

'The Fool, in fact, is an amphibian, equally at home in the world of reality and the world of imagination. [...] The serious hero focuses events, forces issues, and causes catastrophes; but the Fool by his mere presence dissolves events, evades issues, and throws doubt on the finality of fact' (Welsford, 1935, p. xii, cited Babcock-Abrahams, 1975, p. 154).

These citations highlight two of the more controversial aspects of the Fool's agency – firstly that this character brings a quality of chaos to bear on the situations in which s/he operates; which inevitably involves a degree of risk¹². Furthermore, through 'evading issues' these Fools do not drive towards a specific predestined outcome, and the direction of their agency can appear to be left alarmingly without a compass¹³. These points will be developed later in this chapter, when discussing processes of change. I now focus on the characteristic of disruptive playfulness, demonstrated by Fools and by arts practitioners in my study, alike.

¹² I return later also to the significance of risk, c.f. footnote 11.

¹³ Likewise see below for further discussion of the practice of taking a path with no clear destination in view.

The agency of playfulness and joking



Figure 9.1 Laughter as a subversive device [Photo Vlady Díaz]

In a clear link between the disruptive agency of the Trickster and the humour and playfulness the persona universally embodies, and resonating strongly with the humour and playfulness often central to arts practitioners' ways of engaging with project participants (see Chapter 6), Mary Douglas's analysis of the joke is very helpful (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975). Douglas explores the layers of meanings contributing to the impact of a successful joke and, while acknowledging the importance of socio-cultural context, looks for a universal understanding of this universal phenomenon. The main source of a human response to jokes combines several factors, each offering depth of understanding also to the creative function of the Jester figure (and by association, I argue, also to the creative function of the arts practitioners of my study - remember for example 'Ricci' in Chapter 8, flouncing his afro in the mirror in the rap workshop, when considering the following analysis). Looking at

the response to a good joke Douglas frames the joke as a subversive attack on formal structures and on control, including on our own internal ordering, which – after Freud’s analysis – enables a ‘bubbling up’ of the subconscious and a thrill at the release this freedom momentarily allows. This is an attack on the order of things which in the joke context is therefore experienced as enjoyable or funny:

Its excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective. It is frivolous in that it produces no real alternative, only an exhilarating sense of freedom from form in general (Douglas, 1975, p. 96).

Behind this layer of the experience of release, (which for example in the context of a health-related project has a significance of its own), Douglas sees an associated opening of perspectives and meanings not normally accessible: the creation of new images in the mind (a description echoing here the process of metaphor, discussed in previous chapters as a mechanism used by arts practitioners). She suggests through the disruptive agency of the joke ‘a new improbable form of life has been glimpsed’ (ibid, p. 94): this is an interpretive step echoing the glimpsing of alternative worlds, which I suggested, when discussing ‘Lance’ in *The power of difference* in Chapter 8 above, contributes to the allure of the artist.

Douglas argues that this impact is the outcome of another effect, described earlier as embodied in the very duality of the Trickster: the bringing together of disparate ideas not normally in relationship. Such moments of juxtaposition of ideas challenge more standard ways of seeing or understanding their meanings, and the structure which normally holds them separate. This in turn recalls from my own study the previous description from participant

observation of the group of animators in a school dining hall, 'messing with ideas' which are 'surreal potential story lines' invented to accommodate bizarre happenings such as characters' arms or head falling off; and the ensuing discussion of the function and power of metaphor, discussed within the framework of *imagination* above, in Chapter 8, *The Creative Key*.

A further layer of analysis by Douglas focuses on the subversive effects of jokes: 'a successful subversion of one form by another' which 'changes the balance of power'. Not only is the established order subverted in the minds of the audience, but they specifically experience 'uncontrol' gaining the upper hand against control, which in turn according to Douglas provides 'an image of the levelling of hierarchy' (Douglas, 1975, pp. 96-98). For the arts practitioners in my study, creating a world within their workshops in which hierarchies are dissolved is a priority concern – such an environment being where they themselves feel most comfortable. The world of 'uncontrol' in terms of the imagination, and disrupted hierarchies in terms of rules and social structures – which is the Jester-Fool-Trickster world – could in fact be said to be the arts practitioners' element.

To summarise my theoretical argument thus far therefore: many attributes associated with marginality and the agency of marginal figures such as Jokers, Fools and Tricksters offer an illuminating frame for understanding aspects of how arts practitioners may be effective catalysts of important processes, simply through their very marginality, liminality and playfulness. Though easily cast as weak or powerless positions in relation to mainstream society, marginality, the ambiguity of liminality, non-conformity or informality, and the playfulness of a character who appears not to take things seriously are all positions which may,

on the contrary, represent the strengths and the sources of power or capacity upon which arts practitioners are proactively drawing. I will now look at this positioning more directly.

Positioning the joker

So where does this analysis of the multi-layered effect of joking (the practice) place the joker, the Jester or Fool (the arts practitioner) themselves? I now consider perspectives on their position in relation – in turn – to social structures, to other people, and to the processes which may be triggered for other people by their joking or disruptive playfulness. Traditional depictions of Fools show them without status, breaking rules, social conventions and hierarchies with impunity, and the Shakespearean Fools, themselves drawn from real historical Fools employed by royal courts across Europe, provide well-drawn examples of this (Close, 1973; Otto, 2001; Welsford, 1935). The question is how they retain their immunity and continue their jesting, when others may fall foul of rule-makers and suffer expulsion or social exclusion for similar infringements.

In reality of course some of those who are drawn to practice jesting do not succeed in eluding punishment. The risks involved in practicing political satire for example are well-documented by Oring, who seeks hypotheses to explain the ubiquitous occurrence of political joking under repressive regimes, in the face of extreme (sometimes mortal) risk (Oring, 2004). Lewis examines the stakes for political satirists in the Isle of Man, citing two whose brinkmanship repaid them with severe penalty; demonstrating with Oring that immunity is not universal, and that the degree of risk is dependent for these individuals on the

situation in which they were jesting (S. Lewis, 2012). For Douglas, the immunity of the joker rests in the fact that any 'disruptive comments' s/he makes, critiquing established powers, social systems or any current scenario, are understood to represent 'the comments of the social group upon itself' (Douglas, 1975, p. 107). The joker here represents a cipher, a messenger, rather than the originator of subversive ideas; a role echoed in the enduring image of the Fool 'holding up a mirror' (ibid, pp.96-98), able to offer critique which others dare not, and without being held personally to account.

Drawing on my study, I agree with Douglas, that 'jokers' (and their like) may not experience risk of punishment in the same way as other people. However I suggest that crucial to their success and survival in their risky practice are also two of the Fool or jokers' specific qualities: abundant intuition, and their sharp judgement of the subtleties of each situation. These are both qualities noted previously as prevalent amongst arts practitioners. Those cast in the position of the outsider must learn to observe acutely from the margins, in order to understand how to survive as the 'stranger' on the inside (Simmel, 1971 [1908]). In comparing stories of the joker, Jester or Fool with the experiences of the arts practitioners in my study, I argue that on the one hand their impunity is not because there exists no risk for them. It is because, (as shown in the reporting chapters above), arts practitioners are especially well-equipped for judging atmospheres, and need in their work to be acutely sensitised to reading people's moods. Thus their brinkmanship skill is highly developed – they are able to calculate risk very well.

On the other hand I regard the situation of the joker or Fool (and by association the arts practitioner) in relation to systems and structures – manifest in the role of the marginal figure – as something in itself offering

immunity. Because s/he perceives her/his own position in relation to social structures as “differently” eschewed, this offers a certain imperviousness to reproach. By this I mean that practitioners’ ‘disruptive’ influence, (examples of which are discussed above in the section on ‘*The power of difference*’ in Chapter 8) can be registered by authorities as difficult behaviour, with the sanction of a degree of disrespect for their maturity or professional authority sometimes imposed. However Jesters and Fools (and arts practitioners) themselves already see their position as that of an outsider, of unclear status or no meaningful status in relation to mainstream systems. Consider the example of the following exchange:

I recognise that – putting myself in an apologetic position, (L)

Oh yes – being low status: I don’t know, I sometimes think it’s part of my character in a way; I do get underneath people’s radars sometimes. (C)

(Lou, Chris, GD3, UK, 19/8/11)

Where they perceive little of importance to be at stake, no risk threshold comes into play for the joker him or herself, since for those already marginal, exclusion has little meaning¹⁴. This enables behaviour (for example having blue hair, telling jokes, or challenging authority), which appears to others to be risky, or to test or cross boundaries, while for the arts practitioners such boundaries (written in the codes of mainstream culture) may be meaningless or even invisible.

¹⁴ Of course sanctions which involve exclusion from work opportunities do have repercussions for arts practitioners; however, forever marginal in the employment market these individuals are used to problem solving and using ingenuity to create a livelihood for themselves, and perceive such a risk as standard.

The joker and the group: ambivalence in power

After Douglas's analysis, the joker's position in relation to other people is one of momentary alleviator and liberator from the oppressiveness of social reality codes and constructs; since, as already described, the skilful joke intervention disrupts and lightens the formality by revealing these constructs as arbitrary. Having momentarily reframed reality as much more open, the joker lifts the curtain to expose the limitless creative possibilities for re-interpreting it. Hyde proposes a similar function performed by his depiction of the Trickster – 'the revelation of the plenitude otherwise hidden behind conventional form' (Hyde, 2008, p. 295). This is a valuable role that in the hands of the joker, as described, gives pleasure and satisfaction, and the joker's unconventional ability to perform it with impunity in this way imbues the role, I argue, with a 'special' status that lies beyond social structures. This is therefore where the joker (and by my analysis therefore also the arts practitioner) stands in relation to other people: they are certainly 'different', apparently immune to risk, and therefore a bit special.

In relation to processes unleashed by jokers and their jokes, and by arts practitioners and their 'special' otherness, the fact that they are able to hint at different realities or reality constructs puts them in a powerful position for other people, whether or not they themselves seek this. This power originates, I argue, in others' assumption that the jokers themselves have access to the other realities glimpsed through their disruption of the given construct. Thus for the young people he works with, the simple fact that Lance is a break dancer suggests he has access to or shares a special world inhabited by icons, and 'cool' celebrities. The jokes 'expose the inadequacy of realist structurings of

experience and so release the pent-up power of the imagination' (Douglas, 1975, p. 108). So, for example, faced with arts practitioner and rapper 'Ricci', flouncing his afro and busying himself with his face in the mirror, the tough teenage lads in his workshop may temporarily notice a disruption of the structures of macho masculinity which they feel compelled to conform to; or in playful mode with Lou in the art gallery, a group of reserved Muslim mums may find themselves diving across the floor in piles of torn paper, released from conformity to personal composure, and formal respect and reverence for a gallery environment.

However I argue that the power they are perceived by their audiences to have, due to the power of what they can release, is in fact less apparent to the joker than to their audience, and is not necessarily a faculty which the joker would recognise as power. It is a power as catalyst of agency in the other: what the joker/arts practitioner does, often simply by being themselves, is to remove barriers and obstacles to others' imaginations. As such, functioning as an agent of release, the arts practitioner has no hold on these released imaginings of others. This is then perhaps not a power in and of itself, more a capacity and an agency than a power. However, as argued previously in relation to the example of break-dancer 'Lance' (in Chapter 8), in spite of a personal ambivalence towards power, having a powerful effect on people - this illusion of power - has a power of its own.

Arts practitioner and joker: two of a kind

By making the translation from the archetypal Jester, Fool or Trickster, as juggler of realities and conveyor of other worlds, to the arts practitioners in my

study, I suggest that a similar duality in terms of personal power is in play. So the allure of the artist figure, (partly fed by a proximity at a collective subconscious level with the Jester, Fool or Trickster archetype), derives from their otherness, their presumed associations with different realities, their marginality, and their perceived social risk-taking and apparent immunity. This is in addition to any artistic skill they actually demonstrate. As for the arts practitioners themselves: demonstrably wary of ego, seeking to undermine any charismatic effects and any power a special 'artist' status may bring them amongst their workshop participants, and happy to be complicit in the 'outsider' role, they may find that they still hold the power of an allure they cannot control and, by denying it, they may in fact magnify it.

As well as appearing to provide a manifestation of the archetypal Jester figure in relation to people and groups, as explored in Chapter 7 my study found arts practitioners also playing tricks in relation to spaces. Practitioners paid significant attention to changing the feel, mood or significance of workshop spaces, making them feel special, separate from everyday life – recall for example the State Pantheon in Mexico, full of sheep, dog and child skeletons, or the prisoners in Cecilia's project, creating a transformed space for theatre using their blankets. Having discussed the particular agency of the arts practitioner using theories of marginality, Fools Jesters and Tricksters, joking, playfulness and the disruption of structures, I now move on to discuss theoretical perspectives on the interconnected spatial and relational elements of the participatory arts practice assemblage which I found arts practitioners employing.

Spatialities, Atmospheres, and Containment

The spatial and relational qualities of the workshop ecology in which practitioners operate have emerged as central themes in my study, and I now look at the characteristics of the dynamic affective atmospheres of workshops, and their place in a more holistic theorisation of the practice. The term ‘dynamic affective atmosphere’, used to describe one dimension of the ‘spatial framework’ in the practice assemblage, is borrowed in part from Ben Anderson’s exploration of ‘affective atmospheres’ (2009), which offers a useful conceptual hook for this extremely subtle and elusive aspect of the work. Anderson seeks to fathom the interactivity and interrelationship of space and emotions. His reflection on the qualities and properties of affective atmospheres draws on Dufrenne’s *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Dufrenne, 1973 [1953], cited Anderson, *ibid.*), which notes their ‘unfinished’, open ended quality: they are ‘turbulent’, ‘perpetually forming and deforming [...] never static’ (*ibid.* p.79). This characteristic is clearly a feature of the fluid, dynamic ‘affective’ environment of the participatory arts workshops observed in my study – a work in continual construction, as outlined previously; and furthermore resonates with some qualities of liminality: specifically their turbulent, anti-structural quality, and their open-endedness, suggestive of potential, and the ‘subjunctive mode’ of liminality (Turner, 1982), a theme to which I return below.

Anderson marries this aspect with the indistinct spatial properties of atmospheres explored by Gernot Böhme, who characterises them as ‘spatial bearers of moods’ (Böhme, 1993, p. 119), occupying or pervading a ‘sphere’ or space both between people and things and enveloping people and things. This

description shares similarities with the necessity within participatory arts practices to create the sense of a space apart, whether or not the space is physically bounded, or consistently located. I discuss, in previous chapters, as a feature of arts practitioners' practice their strategies for creating a defined project space in which to work; delineating the 'space apart' at least to an extent by its affective and ethical qualities. Böhme's 'sphere' is conceived as a 'dyadic space of resonance' (Anderson, 2009, p. 80). This term refers to a zone of interactive elements involved in a degree of exchange, whereby responses to and contributions to the formation of the atmosphere pass back and forth between people and the space or atmosphere itself, hence reinforcing Dufrenne's dynamic, 'unfinished' description. This characteristic echoes the co-constructed nature of the arts workshop's affective atmosphere, whereby arts practitioners and workshop participants are continually interacting responsively, and co-constructing the atmosphere of their collaborative space.

Böhme's theory highlights the ways in which people can actively manipulate affective atmospheres; they can be 'shaped', 'enhanced', 'transformed', 'intensified' (Anderson, 2009, p. 80), all processes reminiscent of mechanisms engaged by practitioners in my study, and presented above as 'creative keys' of participatory arts practice. These include 'making special' through the transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary (Dissanayake, 1980, 1982, 1988, 1995), and facilitating moments of 'communitas' (Turner, 1974, 1979, 2002), both of which I explore in detail below. Böhme's exploration goes on to discuss the conscious production of affective atmospheres, of which the above strategies are examples, and in his text links this production with efforts to impact on wellbeing, for example through garden art: 'Scenes of a certain quality of feeling can be produced through the choice of objects,

colours, sounds etc.’ which he likens to set design in a theatre context (Böhme, p. 123). In a direction of thought clearly useful in considering the specific aptitudes of creative practitioners in health initiatives, he points out that artists are supremely (and as often implicitly as explicitly) skilled in such ‘production’ and ‘manipulation’ of affective atmospheres. Hence what he terms ‘aesthetics’ – here referring to the entire field of perception (including receiving affective atmospheres) – ‘represents a real social power’ (ibid, p.125); another power therefore that arts practitioners might be considered to possess. For Anderson, atmospheres can be both intensely personally felt, and equally impersonal, belonging to situations and affecting individuals collectively; they are he claims (again recalling the ‘creative key’ mechanisms in Chapter 8 that ‘make special’ and facilitate ‘communitas’), a medium through which ‘intensive space-times can be created’ (2009, p. 80).

In his synthesis of these ideas on ‘affective atmospheres’ Anderson concludes that the ambiguities contained within the term make it suitable for holding in tension the unresolved properties of the phenomenon. These include paradoxes in what it consists of, where it is located, whether a property of subjects or of objects, and the workings of its agency: whether as emotion or affect, and whether created and deliberate in effect (to what degree controllable) or autonomous. In a point useful in highlighting a paradox in my study, Anderson postulates that despite the capacity of some individuals to produce or manipulate them, affective atmospheres are to a certain degree autonomous. Thus as is suggested in the chapter on spatial frameworks above, while arts practitioners may seek to impact upon or mould affective atmospheres, they also claim not to control or seek to control the happenings in workshops, but rather to co-respond, and to contain what unfolds following a

more collective impulse. This ambiguity is, in itself, one of the properties of the typical affective atmosphere in a participatory arts workshop.

*'Liminality': Spaces of altered states,
halls of mirrors*

Methods of creating appropriate atmospheres through altering spaces bear similarities to methods of theatrical stage and set design as noted by Böhme, and draw together the concepts of liminality in ritual, and liminality in creative make-believe or imagination, in the hands of artists: 'Engineers of the Imagination' (Coult, 1983, p. 13). The art installation and accompanying event at the State Pantheon in Mexico City for the Day of the Dead, described in the field notes in the chapter above on the *Creative Key*, is an operation which displays elements similar to Böhme's atmospheric 'garden art', as well as several characteristics typical of Turners' 'liminality' in 'public ritual' (Turner, 1979). Liminal features in this example include the ludic; a man cross-dressed as female power figure and playing trickster; and a subversion or reversal of normal social hierarchies through the sculptural depictions of drunks and gravediggers alongside former presidents and national heroes. Increasing their liminal quality still further, these carnivalesque features are set within the boundaries of a frame (here both temporal in its attachment to the traditional annual *Día de Muertos* festival, and spatial in its containment within an exclusive, highly charged national site of reverence); the artists have set up a subversive imaginative scene that encourages satirical reflexivity by the community on its political heroes. Following Turner's analysis (1979) they are using ritual devices to metaphorically reframe history and encourage reflexive

insight on a normal, established reality: 'liminal phenomena, with a good deal of reflexive commentary interwoven' (1979, p.486).

The second example detailed in the same chapter section, describing a dance of the dead performed by young people in the street, typifies a 'liminoid' application of performance. Turner draws distinctions (previously mentioned in discussing 'spatialities' in participatory arts practice) between 'liminal' and 'liminoid' phenomena, attributing to the latter term more contemporary and diverse manifestations of the 'liminal' spaces found in traditional settings. He describes drama, dance and other art forms as devices more liminoid than liminal, less directly linked to ritual-based, liminal predecessors which he sees as more often associated with pre-industrialised, agrarian or tribal societies, still closely aligned to the cyclical calendar of festivals and traditions. Liminoid phenomena are less aligned to these established patterns, and (interestingly for my purposes in relation to previous discussions seeing marginality as a source of power) develop 'along the margins, in the interstices, and on the interfaces of central and servicing institutions' and are 'often experimental in character' (Turner, 1979, p. 492).

Such an experimental quality is clearly characteristic of the practice investigated by this thesis, in which intuitive functioning (as discussed in Chapter 4) offers practitioners wide scope for experimentation, necessitates improvisation, and enables them to respond in the moment to the needs of the group or situation. Practitioners discuss the thrill of the risk involved in experimenting with new ideas as an important aspect of their work (see Chapter 4 above), and in Chapter 8 I propose the passage through unknown territory,

and risk¹⁵, as key creative elements in the transformative process in the practice assemblage. This element of non-professionalised arts practice, especially in work with vulnerable groups, is one aspect that marks it out as fundamentally different from clinical, therapeutic practices and other professionalised practices including arts therapies, in which there is necessarily a minimal acceptability of risk.

The two examples of community events described above help to illuminate the creative device of Dissanayake's 'making special' and its sister-device of making ritual (Dissanayake, 1980, 1982, 1988, 1995). Both (cited as 'vehicles' in *The Creative Key* above) are common arts mechanisms linked to liminality, with which to invest an experience with increased power and potential. Referring again to practitioner Cecilia's research contribution (cited in discussions on the spatial framework in Chapter 7), in which she describes covering a prison work-shed with blankets to create a performance space: when a space is transformed, a different universe is opened up, and '*anything becomes possible*'. I will now bring Dissanayake's theory of 'making special' to bear in my analysis of the workings of the practice observed in my study. Following Dissanayake's analysis of the origins of artistic behaviour, which she locates in play and the ritual instincts of artists to 'make (things) special', I will look at the links between creative activity, play, liminal spaces, and ritual, all as activated by the arts practitioner.

¹⁵ Risk itself, and the experience of embracing and surviving risk, is considered a powerful catalyst in change processes, often seeding personal development outcomes (Raw, 2009)

‘Making special’

Ellen Dissanayake has written extensively on the origins of some fundamental human capabilities, including art and play (Dissanayake, 1974, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1988, 1995). As a human ethologist her interest is in the function of these as behaviours in relation to human development from the earliest prehistoric times, and her analysis is therefore that of a behaviourist. My interest is different, as I do not seek an explanation here for the emergence of art-making or of play. However Dissanayake’s analysis is useful in the synergy it describes and justifies between these fundamental human behaviours, and in the settings in which it traces their appearance. I use her work here to understand what connects the genealogies of art-making, play and ritual, since this nexus of phenomena has also appeared in my findings on participatory arts practices.

While pointing out that play is not a behaviour limited to the human species, Dissanayake notes similarities between several features of art-making and play as behaviours amongst early human beings. These include i) representation, pretence and imitation (which in my findings correlate with representation through narratives and characters, for example within drama activities or in animation, with representation in visual art, and with the use of metaphor in dance, poetry and so on); ii) finding or creating order, pattern or shape in time or space (which is found in the visual art activities in my study, as well as in music and rhythm workshops, dance, writing, and the games described in many workshops); iii) unifying the contradictory or dissimilar (the core practice in metaphor, as outlined for example in the rap workshop with young offenders); iv) novelty, variety and surprise (manifest both in new experiences introduced through arts projects, and in the differences and idiosyncrasies already

discussed as embodied by arts practitioners themselves); v) experimentation and improvisation (a key element in the findings on intuition, and echoed throughout previous chapters); vi) channelling emotion (discussed by practitioners in relation to the affective potency of activities, the affective atmospheres they talk of holding or moulding, and indeed their own role as 'lightning rod' described in the *Creative Key* chapter); and finally, vii) what she calls 'metamorphosing' (Dissanayake, 1982, p. 149). This correlates in my findings with the act of creating any new work, by which process materials are always transformed; and also in the greater though less visible transformation of participants' perspectives or feelings, and the transformation of spaces of stasis into spaces of potential. The final, less tangible metamorphoses (principle vii) are all outcomes suggested though not directly investigated in my study. Dissanayake posits her list of play/art behaviours as key elements within the 'sociality' strategies of successful human groups, with sociality as a key human survival determinant: groups with successful sociality systems, she suggests, survived, and those without did not. Both art and play, with the shared identifiers listed above, have socialising outcomes – enabling interaction and communication, bringing people together, creating symbols that foster collective identification and reinforce collective endeavour, amongst many other themes – and thus have played unique roles in building strong sociality patterns for human groupings (Dissanayake, 1974).

For me, the interest in this analysis lies in the interrelationship between art-making and play, and between both of these and ritual. For Dissanayake all three can be encapsulated within the single 'human faculty or proclivity for "making special"' (1982, p. 148), itself an element prevalent enough in my findings to be identified as a recognisable theme. In a key point which seems to

connect to the core of the practice in my study, under a strand of her analysis entitled 'The Symbiotic Relationship of Ritual Ceremony and Art', Dissanayake proposes the 'ceremony' (or ritual) as a temporal and spatial frame for 'the making special of things': because this is a place for the 'mysteries and hazards of life' (in which she includes amongst others birth, death and curing illness), where such 'sources of wonder and anxiety' are given space in a symbolic sphere, and in which 'special' care is taken of them (1982, pp. 149-150).

The work of community participatory arts practitioners, as discussed throughout the previous chapters, similarly seeks in a multitude of ways to create 'special' spaces, in which people can reflect on and process challenges, questions and connections, including health problems, bereavement and many other human crises, in an environment of care. Whether or not we may call these spaces 'ceremonies' as Dissanayake does, following her analysis the practitioners in my study seem to be pursuing and enabling opportunities for what is a fundamental human propensity. Finding other opportunities in modern day societies for exercising this propensity – which Dissanayake argues could represent part of a survival strategy for human communities – may be difficult for many people. In largely secular modern cultures such 'ritual' spaces no longer have a recognised place, and sacred 'ceremonies' within religious traditions perhaps offer some people too little flexibility to accommodate the range of forms of expression and reflection required, to give space to the complexity of their life challenges.

Potential in a state of 'play'

There may be little space for creative expression through play (or playfulness as discussed in the previous pages) in most religious ceremonies, despite the fact that many scholars (including Dissanayake as noted) consider play and ritual as intrinsically linked. Play and playfulness emerge throughout my findings as complex creative devices, which are widely seen by contributors as useful and central in this work; and here I consider play states. Other scholars as well as Dissanayake associate play with ritual in ways that resonate with the practice I am investigating (Huizinga, 1970 [1944]; Schechner & Schuman, 1976; Turner, 1977, 1982). For Huizinga 'there is no formal difference between play and ritual', they are both 'temporary worlds, within which special rules pertain' (Huizinga, 1970 [1944], pp. 28-29). He highlights the agency of ritual through play, claiming that all features and mysteries of ancient ritual were performed to 'guarantee the well-being of the world in a spirit of pure play truly understood' (ibid, p.23); meaning by this that human beings needed and visited the spaces of imaginary worlds – play worlds – through these rituals, in order to have confidence in their real world.

Winnicott speaks of the 'potential space' of play. He suggests 'playing has a place and a time [...] It is not inside by any use of the word [...]. Nor is it outside, that is to say, it is not part of the repudiated world, the not-me' (Winnicott, 1971, p. 55). Developing his theory from observing the very first developmental stages of infancy in which the child begins to perceive a world beyond the mother, Winnicott distinguishes an essential 'transition' space of safe separation found in the 'potential space' of 'play', where the infant (and then child) is engrossed, absorbed in their own world of sense-making through

playing. Analysing spaces of learning for students, Metcalfe and Game (2008) describe 'potential space' as 'a holding space because it can *hold* possibilities, without seeking to resolve the space through definition' (p.19); highlighting a tolerance for ambiguity, and open-endedness, which is a recurrent descriptor of the spaces within arts workshops.

'Special' spaces full of positive affect and optimistic outlook often appear to be opened up for participants within project environments. A state of playing is such a 'special' space, and such play-spaces are commonly accessed during participatory arts practice. Practitioner Chris, in describing a workshop structure, even referred to 'the playground' at the heart of the process (in '*Creating a crucible for change*' in Chapter 8). The sense of potential that these spaces convey is similar to the 'subjunctive' mode described by Turner as the liminal space of (secular) ritual:

'...the liminal in socio-cultural process is similar to the subjunctive mood in verbs – just as mundane socio-structural activities resemble the indicative mood. Liminality is full of potency and potentiality. It may also be full of experiment and play. There may be a play of ideas, a play of words, a play of symbols, a play of metaphors. In it, play's the thing' (Turner, 1979, pp. 465-466).

Play is thus not only a creative device or mechanism as described in the *Creative Key* chapter, but also a distinct mode of reality, a space of potential (Winnicott, 1968, 1971).

I have here used a range of theories with which to examine the significance of spatial aspects of the practice assemblage: the work with dynamic affective atmospheres, liminal qualities of the spaces, the ways in which practitioners

make them 'special' to lend them potency, and finally the potentiality of the play-states and play-spaces often facilitated by practitioners, and through this I have opened the door to the final stage of my theoretical discussion. Drawing substantially on Turner's theories of secular ritual, and the capacity he found in such processes for both positive creativity and for change, I now begin to analyse my findings using this lens.

A Practice of 'Liminality' and 'Communitas'

I have so far suggested – in tune with Atkinson and Robson (2012) – that the spaces within community participatory arts workshops are liminoid, and outlined how arts practitioners (in the role of Jester) secure the liminoid state of workshop spaces, using symbolic activities to separate them from the everyday, and to make them 'special'. I now draw on Turner's theorisation of liminal and liminoid spaces and focus specifically on the experiences of 'communitas' they can facilitate, to analyse the complex interactivity of several elements of the ecology of the participatory arts workshops in my study. In his piece 'Liminality and Communitas' (2002) Turner discusses status in relation to liminality noting, in links to ritual traditions, a common reversal of status found in the 'anti-structure' of the liminal space, or the elevating of the status of social 'underlings', relative to the 'structure' of the everyday world beyond the liminal space. The phenomenon of 'communitas' itself is distinguished by its dissolving of any status differences, as previously outlined. Turner also records examples of (at the time of writing, originally in 1969) contemporary social groupings

attracted to the potential of the 'communitas' experience. These included 'the "beat generation", [...] "hippies", [...] those who "opt out" of the status-bound social order and acquire the stigmata of the lowly' (Turner, 2002, p. 370). He also recognised a more timeless association with 'millenarian movements' and monastic orders, court jesters, and socially marginal and counter-cultural groups.

Several resonances exist here with findings in my study, for example the development of community participatory arts, and arts and health practice, from within the counter-cultural movements of the late 1960s, and the fact that most practitioner respondents recounted prior involvement in alternative social and political movements. The reference to monastic orders is interesting in relation to the shared monastic histories of several research respondents, and the marginal status and court jester-like qualities of the practitioners in my study have been discussed in some depth already. For Turner these groupings share a common characteristic which has already arisen in this discussion: 'that they are persons or principles that (1) fall in the interstices of social structure, (2) are on the margins, or (3) occupy its lowest rungs' (ibid, p.371); marginality and 'otherness' as intrinsic characteristics commonly attributed to the artist figure, now constitute a recurrent theme. In relation to the motivations discussed by practitioners for their involvement in this work, there is a further link to Turner's analysis in terms of the groups with whom arts practitioners hope to work, and what they hope to achieve. Practitioners both in the UK and in Mexico have been shown above as motivated to work with marginalised groups, and people disadvantaged within mainstream society; and they seek through their work to offer project participants (their own 'neophytes') different opportunities as a

result of their arts project experience – that they will have new possibilities to improve their situation, or ‘status’.

Witnessing ‘communitas’

Turner’s original conceptualisation of ‘communitas’ was heavily influenced by his experiences of Mexican pilgrimages to the sites of religious icons, which drew his fascination for their symbolic power, and their essence of mass ritual ‘passage’ taking place in contemporary urban settings (Turner, 1974). It was the intensity of the moments he witnessed of shared surrender to a state of collective unity that stimulated his deeper theoretical exploration of the nature of the phenomenon he calls ‘communitas’. When in my Mexican field site I observed the annual pilgrimage and dedication to the subcultural ‘Santa Muerte’ [Saint Death] in Mexico, and discovered later that it bore many of the same hallmarks detailed in Turner’s writings. It was this experience, and its juxtaposition with my observations of community-based participatory arts workshops both in Mexico and in the UK, which gave rise to my increasing interest in a wider application of the ‘communitas’ concept, relevant to my study. I began to see the concept as a way to understand some complex elements of the participatory arts workshop experience. The brief excerpt below, taken from my field trip blog, outlines my unfolding experience at the culmination phase of the four-hour, unauthorised ‘Santa Muerte’ ritual taking place in Tepito, a notoriously unsafe, severely deprived and socially marginalised neighbourhood of Mexico City:

As we get close [...] some people are crawling on their bare knees through the streets, carrying their icons clasped to their chests, demonstrating their deep devotion ('the more blood, the better – it's a brutal display of devotion' says my local friend).

The dedication is led by an unassuming man, who calls to the crowd over a microphone, and they echo back in their thousands, in a format very close to Catholic liturgies. The effect is powerful, intoxicating. Some people are visibly emotional, and others passionately make multiple gestures of crosses over their chests. I find it impossible not to be moved by the force of such a mass of devotion, from people with tough lives, momentarily transformed, and demonstrating vulnerability and trust: in each other as they throng together with strangers, in the target of their devotion Santa Muerte herself, and in the unofficial leaders of this ritual, their 'guides'. I am standing within two metres of the caller, and his body language and vocal manner are also striking: he conveys the impression of a servant, not a leader. Meanwhile Doña Queta [matriarch of the cult in Mexico City] is at the shrine, a few metres away, in private communion with her icon, tears running down her face.

The dedication itself lasts for 45 minutes, building and building, and eventually culminates in everyone holding aloft their icons in silence, in a climactic moment of collective veneration (I think: this must be the epitome of 'communitas'?) and finally erupting into an energetic vocal release, just short of a collective cry of joy. Then the musicians appear again under the gazebo (by my elbow), and people begin again to file up to approach the shrine and have their individual moment, pouring out private anguish to their Santa Muerte. In the crowd people are chatting, eating 'ritual cake' handed out from the front, drinking, smoking, laughing, it feels like a party.

(Journal entry, Mexico, 1/11/11, published as blog)

<http://medicalhumanities.wordpress.com/2011/11/13/mexican-travel-blog-4/>

The power of this experience stimulated new reflection on the atmospheres and interactions I had witnessed in arts projects throughout my study, and my question at the time was to what extent and in what ways this event differed from those. I initially concluded, with some surprise, that the differences appeared minimal. There were distinctions perhaps more in the intensity, the

numbers of participants, and the ritual's explicitly sacred purpose than in the quality of the atmosphere, the interactions between people, the elements of the process, and the apparent effect on participants. With greater distance this conclusion is less confounding – the shared phenomenon of *communitas*, and the conceptualisation of participatory arts workshops as secular ritual experiences, is taking ever greater significance in an analysis of the arts projects phenomenon, as I will now draw together.

Truth seeking: values in the liminal space

Turner locates his own links between liminal spaces or practices and certain human social and cultural characteristics, most of which, furthermore, prove common amongst my research respondents. He views liminality as the artist's element:

Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, "edgemen", who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination. (Turner, 2002, p. 372)

Here the authenticity of 'vital relations', and the passion and sincerity of attempts to avoid hierarchies echo common characteristics my study located amongst practitioners' approaches – the workshop ethos, or 'fabric of values and principles woven by arts practitioners' as I have termed it in Chapter 5. In a further exploration Turner re-emphasises authenticity as an attribute of *communitas*, in relation to powerful social bonding as an outcome: 'a direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities'; in *communitas*:

we place a high value on personal honesty, openness, and a lack of pretensions or pretentiousness. We feel it is important to relate directly to another person as he presents himself in the here-and-now, to understand him in a sympathetic [...] way. (Turner, 1982, p. 48)

Here there are clear echoes of the ‘non-judgemental’ approach to project participants, the ‘unconditional positive regard’ which, as reported above in Chapter 6, *The Relational Framework*, and Chapter 5, *A Practice of Commitment and Values*, practitioners in my study commonly espouse.

Potential for change in liminal spaces

Turner argues that the products of liminality and marginality are ‘myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art’. He sees these products as offering reinterpretations of structure (or reality), and of people’s relationships to society, nature and culture, but which also ‘incite men to action as well as to thought’ (2002, pp. 372-373), – capable of provoking new reflections on reality and empowering people to change the order of things. Other scholars also locate the origins or seeds of change processes in marginal, liminal and creative sites. Dissanayake sees art as a path through which early humankind first became aware of an intrinsic human ability to change things – the origins of proactivity overcoming passivity and suffering – by virtue of experimentation (Dissanayake, 1974, p. 216). Parkin focuses on the non-verbal languages and energy of secular ritual possessing ‘a distinctive potential for performative imagination that is not reducible to verbal assertions’ and thus, likening ritual to art, points to its ‘infinite possibilities for directional change (which), in conjunction with its purposive nature, make it not just performative, but

performative-for-some-goal and for-someone' (Parkin, 1992, pp. 11-12, 17). For Turner then, as for these scholars, and indeed I assert also for the groups involved in participatory creative projects with skilled arts practitioners, 'the ritual [symbol] becomes a factor in social action, a positive force in an activity field' (Turner, 1967, p. 20), making change possible. It is interesting (with reference to considering the agency of participatory arts practice in the hands of the Jester-practitioner) that Turner also makes reference to anti-structural provocations of traditional court jesters, whom he describes as marginal figures, instrumental in restoring justice to structured systems (2002, p. 369).

In all these descriptions of the proactive agency of liminal, ritual and imaginative processes I find similarities with the reflexivity (landscape views) that the passage through creative territories in arts projects was shown to catalyse, exemplified in my reporting by the example of Hayley reflecting in the playground, in Chapter 8, in the section discussing creating spaces for reflection. Participatory arts practitioners it seems, in their practices (as well as in their self-presentations), whether or not they are conscious of liminality and its attributes, embody characteristics common both to such spaces and to those figures Turner and others suggest inhabit them. Recognising that ritual attributes, actors and processes as conceptualised by Turner offer a useful framework for understanding characteristics of the practice and its practitioners investigated in my study, I now adopt the paradigm of a secular ritual model. Using Turner's analysis, and specifically 'liminality' and 'communitas' as foundation concepts, I extend this theoretical framing of arts practitioners' processes into further areas of the practice in my study.

Creative properties of secular ritual

Turning to the quality of the connections between people within the ecology of participatory arts workshops, known within my practice assemblage as the 'relational framework', I am interested in Turner's use of Martin Buber's concept of 'das *Zwischenmenschliche*' to convey the nature of the bonding occurring in moments of *communitas*. This is a concept that highlights a state without ego, in which the bond between people is the focus. He cites Buber:

Community is the being no longer side by side but *with* one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the other, a flowing from *I* to *thou*. (Buber, 1947, p. 31; cited Turner (2002, p.372))

Buber's dialogues with Carl Rogers have been helpful in locating key elements of the relationships between arts practitioners and project participants in my study, which have been observed and described as imbued with positivity, and inhabiting an asset- rather than deficit-focussed perspective on the other (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; South et al., 2013). As discussed in a previous chapter Rogers calls this quality 'unconditional positive regard' (1957, p. 98), a term also consciously cited by several practitioner respondents here as their aim in their relationships with project participants. Buber's phrase for a similar concept is 'confirming the other' (Rogers, 1990, p. 124). Buber and Rogers also discuss the place of empathy in relationships, Rogers concluding that he locates empathy as a key quality of 'client-centred therapy'. Buber identifies an obstacle in the professional distance between client and therapist which renders true empathy, requiring conditions of the more equal *I-Thou* connection, unattainable in a therapeutic situation (Macnaughton, 2009). However the *I-Thou*

or 'Essential We' connection (Turner, 1974, p. 47) seems to fit the friendship-based connections observed between arts practitioners and project participants in my studies very well, confirming suitable relational conditions for 'communitas' to be possible in these workshops.

Turner finds echoes of his *communitas* concept in Zen Buddhism, in which the concept '*prajñā*' (approximating the meaning "intuition") is juxtaposed with '*viñāna*' (approximating the meaning "reason"), to mirror for him 'communitas' as anti-structure (in liminality), in contrast with structure (in everyday life). From this starting point Turner (1974, pp. 46-52) stresses an essential intuitive quality in 'communitas', citing Zen Buddhist scholar Suzuki. Suzuki, reports Turner, claims that '*prajñā*' represents humankind in 'spontaneous, free-creating, non-teleological activities [...] the most dynamic thing we can have in the world' (Suzuki, 1967, p. 80; cited Turner, 1974.). He suggests that intuition (now conceived as both '*prajñā*' and 'communitas') is the essential counterbalance to rigidity of structure, and that without it structure will always fail. Eulogizing at some length the quality of imagination characteristic of liminality and *communitas* he suggests more obliquely:

it is called "creative" because it is the ability to create concepts and conceptual systems that may correspond to nothing in the senses [...] and also because it gives rise to unconventional ideas. It is something like Suzuki's view of '*prajñā*' in its purity. This is the very creative darkness of liminality. (ibid, p.51)

This explanation recalls my earlier descriptions of the territories of creativity traversed during creative workshop processes: marked by not knowing the endpoint or even the path, and necessitating courage and encouragement to travel what is a risky passage. Here clear meanings are rare, replaced by

open metaphors and symbols, inviting leaps of faith in new, irrational directions, and creating '*new windows in walls*' (Mary, 23/5/10, cited previously). These spaces (Turner's liminal spaces and community participatory arts workshops) and their processes, after Turner's iteration, share much in common.

Finally, emphasising intuitive '*communitas*' as proactive in opening up potential, he concludes: 'This is the "flash of the fire that can"' (Turner, 1974, p. 52). In the earlier chapter discussing arts practitioners' intuition as a key feature of the practice in this study, I outlined a series of components of the phenomenon of intuition as it appears to be functioning in the work. There I discussed the 'flashes of inspiration', the instant in which arts practitioners find new ideas sparked by the situation in the workshop, stimulating them to improvise in a state of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), 'reading creativity forwards' (Hallam & Ingold, 2007) to open up new possibilities. This description might very well represent an example of the 'flash of the fire that can.'

Creativity and change

In previously exploring the spatial frameworks of the practice, I raised the question as to whether the common descriptor 'a congenial space' was adequate to convey the common qualities of the spaces created by practitioners for this work; a practice which has at its core creativity as a means of facilitating opportunities for its participants to achieve or create change of some kind. I queried the easy and comfortable qualities implied by the term 'congenial', suggesting that one of the powers which such spaces in fact often draw upon is a quality of occasional or contained *discomfort*. In the explorations in the chapter on the *creative key*, I drew out a series of generic

methodologies and territories of creativity itself, apparent in many of the sites I studied, that elucidate this suggestion. The creative process (journey) facilitated by the practitioners in my study and embraced by their groups, is one which, without the upheavals of emotional intensity, of challenge, the unexpected, the unfamiliarity of otherness, the disruption of structures – all entailing states of uncertainty, risk and facing fears, interim chaos, and new ideas or open-ended possibilities – would hardly exist. Paradoxically, as well as the more commonly cited feelings of exhilaration, and an escape from the pains of everyday life – engendered for example in Csikszentmihalyi's 'Flow' theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) – a degree of (perhaps existential) discomfort, whether mild or powerful, is another quality at the heart of creativity. This phenomenon is perfectly symbolised by '*el gusanito*', or 'the worm', mentioned time and again by one Mexican contributor (*'Manuel'*, 26/10/11) as the phenomenon responsible for his creative searching and journeying. '*El gusanito*' is a metaphor for the drive that comes from '*inquietud*', a word encapsulating restlessness, anxiety, disquiet, worry, but also preoccupation and being interested or fascinated by something.

In the same way that creativity cannot be characterised as *comfortable*, neither is change. The passage of a creative process as articulated here, in fact, shares many similarities with experiences of change. People undergoing such experiences are vulnerable – and need safety and reassurance of some kind throughout. It is in this respect that the arts practitioner, using their relational and spatial frameworks as an essential part of their practice assemblage, plays another crucial part in supporting and facilitating the processes and experiences of workshop participants, as I will now discuss.

Jesters as guides

The role played by the arts practitioner is multivalent in this work. I have discussed in depth the concept of the arts practitioner as marginal figure, bringing possibilities of imaginative worlds and other realities; and as jester, using playfulness to disrupt the status quo to reveal other potential pathways forward, hence in these ways introducing a 'subjunctive mode' into situations which may otherwise appear to be in stasis. The role realised by arts practitioners was conceptualised by one group of practitioner respondents (cited in a Chapter 8) using the paradoxical metaphor of a 'lightning rod'. This concept casts them both as 'catalyst' bringing dynamism and energy, through creative inspiration, enthusiasm and potential as explored above, while also as 'conducting' the atmospheric pressures and grounding the excess energies of a chaotic storm, acting as stable beacon in the wilderness, more similar to the ideas of Böhme. Thus the 'lightning rod' can equally attract a powerful charge, and disseminate it, conducting it to safety. Further to these ideas – and perhaps encapsulating them all – is a function as guide. Familiar with the uncertainties of creative processes, and experts in intuitive group facilitation, skilled arts practitioners are able to accompany project participants in the passage through territories of uncertainty and ambiguity (Turner, 1982, p. 24) during a creative project, which can be unsettling places.

One group discussed whether there was a difference between their role as arts practitioners and the role of a priest – as spiritual 'guide' – and concluded that the similarities were significant. The differences, they felt, lay mainly in the fact that arts practitioners claim to hold 'no ultimate truth' (Cecilia, cited previously), and follow no set proceedings, no "order of service" as guides. Likewise, as reported in the practitioner contribution in Chapter 8, describing a

difference between themselves and the teachers they meet in school, arts practitioners highlight their own acceptance of (tolerance for, even thriving on) unresolved ambiguity – which Metcalfe and Game highlight (above) as one determinant of ‘potential space’.

In this ability to carry uncertainty comfortably, I suggest they are well-equipped to act as guide for the participants in their creative projects, (or ‘passengers’ – the ritual subjects (Turner, 2002, p. 359)), through what can be seen as processes analogous with a ritual journey: a creative ‘rite of passage’ (Turner, *ibid*; van Gennep, 1960). I now explore ways in which such guiding can manifest, using an example from my findings.

Summarising Ritual Features in Participatory Arts Practice

Although initially troublesome for me in the analysis process, due to many arts practitioners’ general discomfort with the notions of manipulation and of the magical or sacred which they associate with it, the concept of ‘ritual’ as a theoretical paradigm to analyse the participatory arts experiences investigated in this research undeniably has several advantages. Reported in the *Creative Key* above using the metaphorical structure of a journey, several ritual features were identifiable: amongst these are the separate space with liminal features; the notion of entering an experience seeking change or new experiences – a journey into new territory; the social bonds which develop during the passage; the equal status amongst ‘passengers’; and the trust given to the arts

practitioners – who can thus be seen as the guides, or symbolic ‘ritual elders’ (Turner, 1969).

I begin here by exploring an account by an arts practitioner that enables the analysis, using ritual concepts, of the creative process she guides. Although not reported in the previous chapters, I have chosen to work with this new data here because it offers a fine example of the bringing together of key concepts for my thesis: participatory arts practice, Turner’s qualities of ‘liminality’, Dissanayake’s ‘making special’, as well as the arts practitioner as guide through an intense shared experience, a form of Turner’s ‘communitas’:

There’s these ritual, magic moments that happen [...] – it kind of sends a shiver down my spine as I talk about it, I can feel it!

(‘Alice’, GD3, UK, 19/8/11)

The description here which begins a longer research contribution by a drama and movement practitioner, captures very powerfully the experience of ‘communitas’ in liminality (Turner, 1969, 1974, 2002), a phenomenon which Turner described as a ‘blend [...] of homogeneity and comradeship. We are presented [...] with a “moment in and out of time,” and in and out of secular and social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond’ (2002, p. 360). The practitioner continues describing one example of the powerful experience she is seeking to convey, and reveals several mechanisms of ritual that she employs in the facilitation process, which she however takes for granted as ‘simple’ creative tools:

...I did a really simple exercise where I just set up a suitcase in the middle of the room, we were looking at transitions and moving on in life, and the

things we take with us and the things that we leave behind, in a kind of symbolic way. And all I did was that, I put a suitcase in the middle and I said 'this is a give and take exercise, so we're not going around the circle, and you don't have to do it, but if at any point you want to, just stand up and place – ' they'd written on a luggage label something they needed to take with them to the next step of their lives –, so I said 'just stand up and place it in the suitcase and just say what it is.'

And then I just left it. And there was silence....

And then the first person stood up – 'Courage.' And the next person – 'Flexibility.' And then a kind of nervous pause when no-one knows what's going to happen next.

In the end everyone did it everyone, everyone at the right time, you know – But for those three minutes everyone was completely together in that 'moment'. It was really powerful! They were really emotional.

There was a shifting of energy and space. It was a kind of shared experience - and it's really strong. The energy from that came from the fact that it was like an electric current around that circle, around that moment in time that we all felt something; it was tangible. People were slightly emotional – tears, and it was very very strong. And it was to do with that it was complicit – there was complete complicity, in the moment.

('Alice' GD3.II, UK, 19/8/11)

This visceral account highlights the quality of shared experience conveyed by the concept of 'communitas', which here is full of physical as well as emotional impact. The essential ingredient, which this practitioner articulates as 'complicity' (an element other contributors to my research also mention as important), is an acknowledgement of a surrender of resistance, a surrender of individual sanctity, to the bigger entity of this group in this moment. This depth of 'complicity', recognised too by other contributors in the discussion, requires enormous trust, and the arts practitioner seeking to facilitate these '*holy grail*' moments (Lou, GD4, 11/10/11) needs to facilitate the dynamic affective atmosphere of the group with immense skill. For achieving this, as explored previously, their intuitive mode is a fundamental facility.

Within the 'simple exercise' the practitioner describes here, there are generic components of creativity in use, as well as constituent phenomena of Turner's 'liminality', and of 'communitas', in evidence – as I will now explain. The practitioner is using some of the *vehicles* I have explored previously, to propel the group process towards the point of shared experience and complicity that she describes so powerfully. Her initial vehicle is metaphor. She uses a double metaphor here, by symbolising change through the idea of a journey, and symbolising the journey by using a prop: the suitcase. She then uses the vehicle of Dissanayake's 'making special' by placing the group in a circle, leaving an empty space, into which she places the suitcase. This creates special conditions (within an ordinary community hall setting) of a space now charged with a sense of ritual: the space inside the circle is liminoid, symbolising the territory of transition between contemplating a journey of change, and initiating that change. The suitcase now has the attributes of a double metaphor, and of a ritual instrument – it has been made extremely special: a form of altar to the idea of change and positive progression. Each 'neophyte' is invited to approach this altar individually, and offer something of themselves: a personal hope or pledge, declared as a feeling or human attribute, here in the metaphorical form of a luggage label. The theatricality of the moment is conveyed in the pauses, full of suspense.

Here the group together (including the practitioner) takes the passage through the territory of uncertainty. Initially there is the uncertainty that anyone will contribute by approaching the altar. (If nobody had come up, the exercise as planned would have failed, and the practitioner would have needed to improvise her next steps). Next there is the uncertainty and contingent risk for each individual that their contribution might fail to measure up to expectations: it –

and by association, they – may not be accepted, appreciated, or perhaps understood by the group. Added to this is the intense focus of the group on each individual as they approach the altar, and their personal uncertainty about how this will feel and whether they can take on the weight of attention. Then, having all together traversed the territories of uncertainty and risk, lasting three minutes, the peak of the experience is reached, which the practitioner describes in the introduction to her account as a ‘ritual, magic moment’. Heightened by metaphor and ritualistic ‘making special’, all of which load the situation with significance and meanings; then galvanised through the shared and individual embracing of risk and uncertainty, as well as the shared experience of investing an imagined future reality with potential and positive anticipation, the group experiences a moment of ‘communitas’ which, as experienced here I propose, constitutes a place of change.

I have outlined in this discussion how Turner’s ritual theory, and particularly concepts of ‘liminality’ and ‘communitas’ can be used, to frame the creative journey, undertaken by those participating in community arts projects, as a secular ritual. In this secular ritual the desired outcome is to challenge the status quo, and open up new potential for imagining different future realities, different everyday ‘structures’. Under the guidance of the trusted arts practitioner, groups pass from every day normality into the anti-structure of liminal or liminoid space within the workshop environment, where they encounter new experiences and – whether dramatically or subtly – disrupted or altered perspectives on their realities, or on themselves (seen earlier in the distanced reflection achieved in many creative processes). During this process they can be seen as ritual neophytes, encouraged to interrelate in trusting openness and

in equality, to take new risks (creatively, emotionally and socially) which expose them to vulnerability. Their creative guides facilitate their safe passage through this unknown territory, during which there may be moments of *communitas*, intensifying the process and creating new social bonds of shared experience. At the other end of the ritual journey, they re-enter everyday life, carrying the resonances of their liminal experiences, which for some ritual subjects can catalyse new resolve or new energy, to make changes in their everyday reality 'structure' (or construct). This is the catalytic agency of the 'workshop ecology'.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have drawn on theoretical paradigms from several fields, to lend greater understanding to the way the participatory arts practice assemblage I have developed works in practice; with its intense focus on qualitative aspects (such as moulding affective atmospheres, and recognising and valuing human potential), as well as on creativity and arts activity. Using an overall frame of secular ritual, and drawing substantially on the ideas of Victor Turner I have described this as a practice of liminality, in which the marginal agency of the individual arts practitioners (theorised in terms of the Jester, Fool or Trickster) enables, within the workshop ecology, the opening of new glimpses of other ways of being or living. Creativity is conceived within the assemblage as a catalysing force, acting within a liminal space which practitioners work carefully to co-construct with participants. This force engages the juggling of realities, the 'making special' through ritual processes, and the worlds of imagination and play to create conditions for change. I have suggested that arts

practitioners, using a range of creative devices, encourage project participants to externalise stories, challenges or imagined situations, so that they can position themselves at a distance, and view them from a different perspective. A skilled arts practitioner, as guide I propose, facilitates supported opportunities for people to reflect on their realities with fresh eyes, a process which can open up the potential for people themselves to initiate change or movement, in their lives beyond the liminoid spaces of the project.

While the frame I have used here for my theoretical analysis is the one that emerged as most salient, there are other angles I had to set aside in conducting my theoretical analysis. Suggestions for future study include analysis using theories of arts practices (theories of socially engaged arts practice, and the role of the contemporary arts practitioner), or examining the work through a political lens, on both a micro level (power relationships within the workshop setting) and a macro level (the workshop as a site of resistance and activism). However I now take a step up in relation to my findings, to consider their implications when viewed from above, with the following question: What is the significance of the international comparison in this study? What does the similarity in findings in the UK and Mexico mean? I will consider these questions now in Chapter 10.

Chapter 10

Transnational and Contextual Perspectives

In this chapter I step away from the practitioner perspectives of those in both national settings to consider their contextual situations, and discuss the study's findings in relation to differences in these respective national contexts in which practitioners in the study are working. With the question (in relation to the significance of the similarities I found in practice characteristics): *can a common, international community arts and health practice be identified?* I interrogate the findings afresh. I explore the extent to which convergences and divergences in data sets from each national setting may be attributable to cultural and historical characteristics specific to Mexico and the UK, in order to understand my findings in the light of these contextual differences. I begin with brief reflections on context-specific definitions for the work in the two countries, and then move on to sketch the respective historical narratives of related practice and ideas.

Definitions of community participatory arts

This is a creative practice that, as outlined previously, arts and health discourses in the UK context consider deals in the ‘social determinants of health’, highlighted by Marmot and colleagues over the past decade (Marmot, 2005; Marmot et al., 2006). As a result of the work of White (2009) and others, harnessing and arguing for this concept as fundamental to an understanding of community-based participatory arts work in the UK, the term “arts and health” does not jar in the UK context. It has readily accessible reference points for many people, and is certainly familiar to arts practitioners, widely accepted as one descriptor (amongst many) of this practice (others including references to social or political engagement, to inclusion and to development) (Raw et al., 2012). However in the Mexican cultural context, what emerges as a highly similar practice is rarely described as health-related: the link to health is generally more ambivalent. ‘Health’ as a term in Mexico has strong associations with clinical procedures and medical institutions, with less focus on a social health paradigm. Although all Mexican correspondents contributing to the study describe clear health benefits from the work and, in an example cited earlier, one project leader articulated the purpose of his project with the metaphor of a hospital Accident and Emergency room, in contemporary Mexico the term “arts and health” as a concept currently has little traction.

This separation of the concepts of arts and health in Mexico has not always been the case, as demonstrated by Berman and Jimenez (2006) in their historical record of the ideas of early 1920s Mexican post-revolutionary Education Minister José Vasconcelos. Promoting the democratic right of every Mexican to access an education in the arts, his rationale was that this could achieve for ordinary Mexicans a sensibility and peaceful communal coexistence:

a state of wellbeing more advanced in his view than simple health. The promotion, at policy level, of ideas linking arts intrinsically with health and wellbeing did not continue in Mexico beyond 1924 and the end of Vasconcelos's term in office, (with just specific rural education initiatives that used theatre continuing until 1940). A similar strategy did re-emerge in the mid-twentieth century when the IMSS [Mexican Social Security Institute] committed itself to providing cultural activities for its dependents, with the idea that art plays a fundamental role in the individual's wellbeing. At that time it built up what was the largest infrastructure of theatres in Latin America (Berman & Jimenez, 2006, pp. 89-90); however this, again, was an isolated example of the strategic linking of arts with health, and was moreover less interested in participation in arts activity than in wide access to the arts as audiences. In contemporary Mexico, as highlighted in the literature review in Chapter 2, the participatory arts practice of this study is more commonly described as a 'social' or 'cultural' intervention, or a form of 'arts education', linked with social inclusion rather than specifically health aims and outcomes (Jimenez et al., 2009).

The difference highlighted here in the significance of 'health' concepts for Mexican and UK definitions of the work suggests nuances in understanding of the place of the work within each society. However such nuances may be related more to differences in cultural histories, and to funding sources and institutional level policy remits than to more deeply embedded differences in conceptions of the work itself. To explore this I need to reflect briefly on the social contexts for the practice in each country.

Social and Practice Context

The British legacy of radical movements and social concern

Most scholars agree that the historical context for community participatory arts and health practice in the UK, outlined in some detail in the introductory chapter to this thesis, can be traced through successive movements and artists nationally and internationally throughout the past century. These groups believed passionately in using their artform to foster dialogue and create work directly with people, to engage with disenfranchised groups and to give people a voice (Crehan, 2011). Beginning with Adrian Henri's text 'Total Art' asserting a heritage linking the performance art experiments of the 1920s to an emergence of 'community art' in the 1960s, (Henri, cited in White, 2010, p.13), commentators name radical pioneers and influences across all art forms, especially evident in the international counter-cultural eruptions of the late 1960s and early 1970s. According to Kelly, artists in the UK were engaged at that time in an 'outpouring of apparently radical cultural activity', concerned with 'taking art into the streets, and giving it back to the people'. He documents a succession of initiatives 'woven from three separate strands' – a passion for seeking new forms of expression; liberating art from traditional elite culture houses: the galleries; and the enthusiasm of political activists for creativity as the means to galvanise radical struggle (O. Kelly, 1984, p. 9). Hamilton et al. point to the broad focus of the early community arts movement in the UK as 'arts plus social concern' (Hamilton et al., 2003, p. 401) highlighting artists' preoccupation from the beginning with a wider social change agenda: 'Social

concern is present in every artist, but to arts in the community it is fundamental' (Brinson et al., 1992, p. x). Further links in the development of ideas may be traced to the radical protest movements of this period in the UK, including – of note for this discussion – the feminist tenet 'the personal is political', which became widely absorbed at the time by discourses amongst the alternative left (Hanisch, 1970). The indications from these accounts are that a gradual collective awareness has developed amongst artists in the UK, certainly since the latter 1960s, of alternative and participatory ways of engaging with communities through their work, and that today's community participatory arts practitioners are clear inheritors of this legacy.

International bridges

Movements influencing and chiming with this British radical arts scene originated in Europe, the USA and in Latin America. Van Erven (2001) describes the context of an international evolution of community theatre, its initial emergence occurring in the 1960s in South America, after which similar movements 'sprung up' independently in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe (including in Britain) and the United States. Kuppers and Robertson (2007) along with White (ibid.) and van Erven discuss, as noted in Chapter 2, the pivotal inspiration for community performance found in Brazilian Augusto Boal's many experiments with participatory drama forms through the 1960s in Brazil, and continuing since then in exile in Europe, under the umbrella terms 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (Boal, 1979 [1974]) and 'forum theatre'. Also cited as significant in the Mexican practice narrative, Boal promoted theatre as an 'open-ended process [...that] shows how the real world can be changed as participants test out their ideas

for transforming it' (Frischmann, 1994, p. 294) – a model bearing close resemblance to the work in my study. Boal's work was heavily influenced by the democratic empowerment ideas of his Brazilian contemporary Paulo Freire (1996 [1970]), working on radical popular education models, which were influential throughout Latin America and beyond (Pearce et al., 2010). Boal and Freire, then, provide an indirect bridge between the participatory community arts ideas and practices developing in both the UK and Mexico, certainly within the discipline of theatre and performance, as indeed practitioner research respondents in both settings acknowledged.

The Mexican legacy of politicised artists, and State instrumentalism

Unlike the well-traced history of the practice by scholars in the UK, the Mexican story of participatory and community arts practice is much less evident within scholarly literature – certainly literature in the English language. Blumberg (1997) highlights the centuries-long, international traditions of puppetry that have developed a rural, community artform from ritual and folk art into a powerful, health-promotion-as-political-activism medium, now particularly strong in African countries but evident elsewhere, notably in areas of low literacy (Panford, Nyaney, Amoah, & Aidoo, 2001). Though not a tradition feeding practice in the UK in any significant way, this heritage is certainly evident in Mexico; for example, (rather cynically) even as far back as the early sixteenth century the Spanish colonial invaders built their early conquest strategy on mimicking and riding on local indigenous folk rituals to help embed their authority (Beezley et al., 1994). A folk arts approach was then later adopted by

early post-revolutionary Mexican governments, in the more benign quest of promoting popular education amongst rural communities (Frischmann, 1994). Deeply rooted folk arts traditions are then a foundation stone of community-based arts practice in Mexico, marking one culturally specific source on which practitioners in Mexico may draw.

It is initially important to emphasise that the cultural history of Mexico City itself is specific within Mexico. From the revolutionary period of 1910-17 onwards, the capital Mexico City weathered a half-century of 'cosmopolitan' curiosity (Suski, 2010) from the world's intellectual elite, seeking affinity with Mexican post-revolutionary idealism. European and US radicals and artists were inspired by the new Mexican government's declared commitment to serving the interests of ordinary people, and particularly the aforementioned Education Minister José Vasconcelos's (1920-24) support for public art (Azuela et al., 1994).

The Mexican radical or alternative arts history is marked by the stories of iconic individuals, as much as by wide movements of artists as in the UK. Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, having travelled as a young artist, developing his ideas amidst the European Avant Guard art movements of the time, was later exported a powerful Mexican cultural icon. He established an international identity as a radical political and cultural activist through his mural art, closely aligned with political messaging for the Mexican regime (Marnham, 2000). A tendency for the arts and artists to be seen by governments or communist ideologues in Mexico as their instruments of propaganda was resisted by one group of key individuals: muralists O'Gorman, O'Higgins and Morado claimed the necessity of political independence for artists (specifically from the Mexican Cárdenas regime of the time). Unhappy with the persistent instrumental

appropriation of visual artistic expression, in 1938 they founded the 'Taller de la Gráfica Popular' [people's graphic arts workshop], cited in the literature discussion in Chapter 2 as the closest early precursor mentioned in the literature for community-based participatory arts practice in Mexico City, and providing an early example of cultural, democratic activism (Azuela, 1993; Azuela et al., 1994). Key artists' public ethical battles over political allegiances during the two decades between 1920-40, and the publications and debates they spawned amongst radical artists in the US and Europe, are early 'testimony to (Mexican) artists' conviction that their work should be at the service of society' (Azuela, 1993, p. 87). This idea was also a theme evident amongst the narratives of those practitioners I researched in Mexican settings.

The international exchange of ideas amongst artists and the intellectual 'Avant Garde' elites in the early twentieth century constitutes an influential backdrop to social and political movements' interest in using artists' skills for disseminating political ideologies, and to the concept of arts in 'the service of society' in both the UK and Mexico, and Mexico City was clearly a nexus for such exchange at that time. One difference between the ideas of arts practitioners in the two national settings that may flow from this background is the greater emphasis placed by Mexican practitioners in my research on the political relevance of their practice, and their identification of the artist as conscious activist. Embodied in the iconic historical figures and enduring public art legacies of political muralists Rivera, Siqueiros, O'Gorman and others, and for example with the increasing international celebration of the artist and cultural icon Frida Kahlo, the role of the artist as political and social revolutionary is a clear historical reference point in Mexico. Although no contributors to the current research made reference to these giants of Mexican

art history, the powerful national narrative of iconic artist-activists is a phenomenon resonant in the present, displayed with pomp and pride in public art throughout Mexico City's cultural quarters. While no such model resonates with any dominance in the UK, this background surely impacts on Mexican arts practitioners' consciousness of their place in society. To complement this framing of the social and practice context in both contexts I now focus on the respective policy contexts supporting the work, with some brief historical references.

Cultural policy and resourcing context

UK: a picture of piecemeal support

In Britain early seeds of contemporary engagement with notions of arts for the wellbeing of the many are found in mid-nineteenth century intellectual thought, catapulted into debate by the socialist utopian writings of John Ruskin and William Morris and the 'Arts and Crafts Movement' from the second half of the nineteenth century (Crawford, 1997), and significantly Matthew Arnold's 'Culture and Anarchy' (1869, cited in White, 2009). From the other end of the social and political spectrum 'enlightened capitalist' industrialist philanthropy (ibid.) provided a certain cultural betterment offer for the uneducated masses. This can be seen for example in wealthy industrialists' patronage of open access art galleries built in public parks, libraries, evening classes, and choirs and brass bands organised for mining and textile mill workers, to maintain healthy lungs and divert activity from the scourge of alcohol. At the end of the nineteenth and turn of the twentieth century, the educational 'settlement movement' became

known in the North East of England for its 'Pitmen's Academy', fostering the later renowned 'pitmen painters' (Vall, 2004); and the fledgling 'Workers' Education Association' pursued a democratic agenda through adult 'continuing' education, including art and poetry, for the working classes (McIlroy & Spencer, 1989; Romans, 2005). In the same period, prominent artists and writers of the bohemian 'Bloomsbury Group' were infamous – thanks to the 'standard reading of an apolitical Bloomsbury' (Joyce, 2004, p. 635) – not specifically for their activism in the cause of social justice, but for breaking social taboos and aligning themselves rather with the ethic of "Art for Art's Sake" (Singer, 1995). Political leadership by British artists, which could be considered equivalent to the activism of their contemporaries in Mexico, was far less prominent. A form of activism was evident to a degree perhaps in the pacifist movement of 1914-19 voiced most powerfully by the war poets, who were driven (by direct experience) to capture the suffering and inhumanity of trench experiences, injury and disfigurement (Malvern, 2000, p. 182). Largely, then, this UK cultural narrative is characterised by leading contributions from key philosophers and campaigners, rather than from artists.

In government policy terms, public subsidy for the arts in Britain has an equivocal history. Despite the contemporaneous debate drawing attention to the social value of art, White cites an oblique, luke-warm interest on the part of the Arts Council, at its inception in 1947, in arts engagement for all, or for a common good, choosing instead to celebrate high art as an edifying audience experience. It was not until the early 1970s that the Arts Council of Great Britain (as it was then) began funding community arts activity, even then on a reactive, rather than strategic basis (Brinson et al., 1992). The UK funding picture for participatory community arts since then, continually buffeted by ever-

shifting public policy tides mapped in meticulous detail in White's seminal work (2009), has been growing ever-more complex over a period of decades. Funding sources have become increasingly diverse, from the 1980s and 1990s becoming less dependent on Arts Council funding, relying more on local government departmental budgets, and some work beginning to receive funding through health services, all on a project-by-project basis. Funds came from 'youth, education, and regeneration budgets with a range of overt, if vague, social objectives' (Matarasso, 2007, p. 450). Since Matarasso's record the picture has fragmented still further, due to British central government moves towards commissioning out public service delivery, away from public sector agencies and towards voluntary sector and private sector deliverers; and in the current climate of "austerity Britain" government funding for the arts (including community and participatory arts) via the Arts Council of England has been savagely reduced.

The significance of the patchwork funding pattern in the UK is the difficulty it creates for organisations to sustain projects for longer than a few months or even weeks. Without a clear strategic policy to support this work few projects continue for longer than a year, those that do suffering from constant pressure to justify their value, and needing repeatedly to outwit rapidly changing funding agendas which would otherwise dismiss them as no longer addressing the current priority. Another impact of such diversity in funding sources, with the spectrum of project aims and expectations becoming ever more dispersed across instrumental agendas, is a fragmentation of the sector's own sense of purpose or value to society. Kelly (1984), cited in Chapter 2 on this point, forewarned of such a disorientation within the UK community-based arts sector, if practitioners allowed themselves to be dictated to by funders' agendas.

In Mexico City as will be outlined below, although the necessity for projects to fundraise is also a pressure, and funding for the projects in the study was often from more than one source, the picture seems less fragmented than in the UK, and state support is a mainstay which enables certain flagship projects to survive and flourish over many years, as will now be explored.

Mexico: a picture of State intervention

In Mexico the historical record on cultural policy begins after the popular uprisings and revolutionary period of the early twentieth century, with the first post-revolutionary Government of president Álvaro Obregón from 1920-24. Since that point cultural policy and support for artist activity, where evident, has been to a greater or lesser extent closely bound to clear, politically instrumental policies and ideologies of governance. These can be seen initially in the previously mentioned 1920s revolutionary goals of popular education, with popular theatre used to carry messages of the value of good health, and education for empowerment, and the government commissioning public art murals within Mexico City itself to consolidate the contemporary regime's articulation of the history of the Mexican people(s) (Folgarait, 1991).

Over the early post-revolutionary period from 1920-40, Vasconcelos's 'Misiones Culturales', charged with the instrumental use of performing arts, puppetry and popular theatre, in the cause of popular education, and the dissemination of health messages as cited above, used a formal, paternalistic and didactic style. Like the public mural programmes of the time these cultural policies were unmistakeable propaganda tools, an instrumentalisation of the creative media for State messaging (Frischmann, 1994), a marked contrast with

the UK cultural policy narrative. Other than this trend, national cultural policy itself in Mexico from the middle of the twentieth century offered little to support community arts, or a democratic access to arts activity, choosing instead to promote “high culture” and a national arts identity based on the individual artist as cultural beacon, exemplified in the grand Mexican arts narrative of the first half of the century referenced above. (Jimenez et al., 2009)

In the discussion of literature in Chapter 2, reference is made to a key point marking change in the narrative of community-based access to arts activity in Mexico City specifically – the 1985 earthquakes, which stimulated the emergence of voluntary sector initiatives in response to crisis. Some of these organisations, as well as the legacy of grass roots activism, remain today (Rosas Mantecón, 2011), and clearly played a part in the personal narratives of several Mexican research contributors. A second key moment in this same narrative was the 1997 inauguration of the first democratically elected City Government and Mayor of Mexico City independent of federal control. This change unleashed a new phase of cultural policy, which has been much more interested in the value of community arts initiatives (Nivón & Rosas Mantecón, 2002), for example supporting and rolling out the beacon ‘Red des Faros’ (Network of ‘Lighthouse’ projects) which are vast arts and cultural centres based in five of the most disadvantaged areas of Mexico City. These are neighbourhoods with serious and enduring problems especially amongst young people, including drug abuse, violence, and social and economic exclusion on an epic scale. In response to communities in crisis of this kind the open access projects offer spaces for creative and social interaction, arts and trades workshops, as well as libraries and online learning facilities free of charge. The first of these, ‘Faro de Oriente’ which is a project included in my study, has been

funded by the City Government for twelve years. Rosas Mantecón further notes that despite City Government policy in support of community-based cultural intervention of this kind, projects still face sustainability challenges; and hence, in an echo of the UK narrative, 'dependency on various sources of public financing has made their operative autonomy fragile'. However, instrumental appropriation of cultural activity is still an obvious trend in the Mexican context, with a pattern of the work:

'having been instituted at a time of emergency [...]. This has tended to favour a purely instrumental use of creativity, undermining its experimental form and assigning expectations that cannot be fulfilled when using the model in an isolated way.' (Rosas Mantecón, Op.Cit.)

The level of sustained and strategic support for the work from the Mexican public purse demonstrated by the example of the 'Red des Faros' is not evident in the UK – a much richer society. However the State's involvement in supporting projects is rarely without a cost, and the legacy of instrumentalisation of the arts in Mexico is strong.

The above comparisons of the UK and Mexican community and participatory arts narratives at both policy and practice levels are now used to interpret the areas of research findings which displayed divergences along lines of national context.

Distinctions in Findings Along Lines of National Context

It is only in the area of what motivates individual practitioners to deliver community-based participatory arts projects, rather than in the character of that practice itself, that differences between contributions from practitioners based in the two national settings can be discerned. Certain divergences in the study's findings on practitioner discourses indeed align with themes of difference already highlighted in the above comparisons of the UK and Mexican contexts. One example is the clear theme amongst the Mexican contributors of political activism as a motivation for their work:

Fighting for these spaces for a multiplicity of voices to be heard I think is crucial. Many women are entirely erased, and have no voice, and are absolutely powerless.

(‘Liliana’, dialogue, Mexico, 14/11/11)

Contributions expressed the imperative to challenge systems and norms and to bring to wider attention deep injustices and brutality within Mexican society, expressed for example here with reference to the situation of women. There was a strong socio-cultural theme to these practitioners' research contributions, expressing that through their work they seek to build community, and to foster cultural change:

Violence is a huge problem here, and it's a product of many years of learning an authoritarian way of operating, machismo towards women,

children, disabled people, against minorities ... The antidote to an authoritarian approach is flexibility, tolerance, dialogue. And we need to foster this.

(‘Alfonso’, dialogue, Mexico, 14/11/11)

They commonly hoped to offer new or alternative models for learning, based on practical systems, and an egalitarian ethos, and felt committed to offering disadvantaged, marginalised and disaffected groups within Mexican society access to creative skills, and the chance to learn associated trades.

Poverty - poverty of spirit, economic poverty - is negative, and you have to combat its effect on people. If you can improve levels of wealth and spiritual wellbeing, things will be better for people. That’s a principle. That’s my motivation. That people can develop an activity that improves their standard of living.

(‘Juan’, dialogue, Mexico, 11/11/11)

Based on the responses generated during research dialogues in Mexico, I characterise these practitioners’ perception of their role as a socio-cultural and politically engaged proactivity in relation to their society as a whole, working through relationships with individuals and community groups to effect the greater change they perceive to be so urgently needed. As ‘Juan’s’ comment in Chapter 5 asserted, most people in this field of work are idealists.

Amongst the UK-based practitioners’ contributions, although some political or activist motivation was also expressed here, it emerges as a less prominent characteristic. Specific to the UK-based research contributions were themes concerning a personal motivation to collaborate creatively with groups of people, whether experienced or inexperienced in the arts – the desire to share experiences:

I really enjoy just being with people and really engaging with people. And I do it through making things, together... and that is just a joy, it's so fantastic, it's such a brilliant thing.

(Ali, dialogue, UK, 11/2/11)

There was a common desire to be in a playful relationship with others; and encourage people to enjoy each other's and their own company, and several respondents highlighted being motivated by their own curiosity to understand other people and their lives. Some were motivated by the thrill of people's originality (highlighted earlier as a form of wonder), and discovering what they are capable of. British respondents often spoke about the motivating effect of witnessing people change their lives or their outlook:

For me the motivation really does come from seeing how much particular vulnerable children blossom when they're involved.

(Heather, dialogue, UK, 9/9/10)

Thus in an echo of the feminist focus on 'the personal is political' (Hanisch, 1970) mentioned earlier as influential, the study identifies a greater emphasis amongst the British practitioners than amongst their Mexican counterparts on being motivated by the individual interactions and relationships with project participants and with groups. Their contributions frame their perception of their role as a socially engaged proactivity in relation to the groups and communities with whom they work (rather than in relation to their society as a whole), seeking through this level of interaction to offer positive inspiration and cultivate (or 'open up') possibilities for change, which may take effect at all levels: personal, communal, institutional, cultural, societal, political:

It's something about the individual, and the collective... it works because without those concentric rings – I wouldn't be making a difference to that community, I wouldn't be helping kids make a cultural change in the community. To me it's about their place in the world in which they operate. ... For me it's like, you know when you're a kid, and on the back of your exercise book you wrote your address, and it started with you, and ended with – 'the universe'. To me it's like that.

(Mary, GD1, UK, 19/8/10)

The personal narratives of the two cohorts of respondents traced the significant experiences which lie behind each individual's motivation and involvement in this work. The findings show some subtle differences here too, between Mexican and British arts practitioners' backgrounds; though divergences were found largely in the accents or intensities of experiences only, while many core experiences were similar. For example, though evident in both groups the number of Mexican respondents recounting previous involvement in political, social and educational activism was higher than amongst British respondents, and these experiences had carried greater personal risk in the Mexican context. The study indicates a more life-long direct engagement amongst the Mexican practitioners with the bigger themes of society and state, where many expressed perceiving immense and disturbing problems. The areas in which the British respondents shared more similarities with each other than with the Mexicans (though similar themes were apparent in both cohorts) were in the personal arena – more British practitioners talked about experiences of marginality, and about recognising other individuals' emotionally challenging situations. Overall the comparative data, perhaps unsurprisingly, indicate that the bigger issues of society and State had been more of a preoccupation for

the Mexican practitioners than for their British counterparts, who tended to engage with the individual story more readily than with systems and structures.

The extent of contextual influences

These national distinctions in what lies behind practitioners' involvement in this work seem to confirm contextual influences on practitioners' sense of its place, and hence of their own function or contribution, within their own societal settings. Thus the role of the artist as political and social revolutionary is a clear historical reference point in Mexico, which helps explain an identification amongst Mexican practitioner respondents with the notion of the artist as activist. The additional influence here of the socially engaged praxis ideas of Paolo Freire, and the Latin American popular education movements, active in neighbouring countries across Central and South America, can also be identified in the Mexican arts practitioners' framing of their work as 'social' and 'educational'. In this they are, like Freire and his followers, experimenting with egalitarian, active learning models, and seeking to further social justice through their educational engagement with disenfranchised groups.

As discussed above, the British history of artist pioneers offers no sustained narrative that situates artists as iconic activists and political revolutionaries, and practitioners in my study in turn do not overtly describe themselves or their work as primarily political or activist. British socio-political history maps a society of communities in daily struggle rather than in epic crisis, with societal structures and institutions longer established and less acutely punishing of ordinary people than in post-colonial and post-revolutionary Mexico. In contrast to its emergent stage, at which point the practice has been

convincingly linked to the political movements of the day (O. Kelly, 1984), at the current point of its development the arts funding system in the UK has fragmented any focus on “societal change” into many splintered streams of localised activity. Overtly socio-political leadership by artists at a level of cultural or consciousness change, as evident in Mexico, has not been validated or promoted. Where there is instrumentalisation in the UK arts policy narrative this has been in the service of the softer outcomes of neighbourhood regeneration or health promotion; and hence despite engagement in political activism in their own histories, British community participatory arts practitioners frame their contribution here in terms of its person-centred attributes: a discourse of the personal and communal, as opposed to systemic or structural change.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to situate the ideas and work of participatory arts practitioners in the UK and in Mexico within their respective cultural contexts. As shown, differences in the areas of perceptions of their agency through this work, and its motivation for them, can indeed be identified as attributable to historical narratives and cultural perspectives. Most significant and most surprising of all amongst these comparative findings, however, is the firm indication that, despite framing their work with different emphases, no difference was found in the character of the practice itself, as delivered by very diverse practitioners in entirely different and separate settings in different countries. All practitioners discussed their working practices in similar ways and

demonstrated very similar methodologies, resulting in the unified practice assemblage presented in Part Two.

This is a finding which I suggest may postulate, in the sense explored by Skinner (2007) in relation to the leaders of 'salsa' dance classes, the emergence of a contemporary, 'cosmopolitan' community of practitioners. Applied here this is the concept of practitioners who, with no awareness of each other, or of each others' work, display practice characteristics in common across international boundaries. Though there may be different attribution of the purpose or value of the work to different agendas of change and community wellbeing, in fact the needs of those in the workshop remain consistently rooted in their humanity, and in their inability to flourish due to the challenges they face. The study here suggests that the artists' response through their practice derives from their own 'cosmopolitan' humanity: such that 'their humanity (consciousness, creativity, individuality, dignity) transcend[s] cultural peculiarities' (Rapport, 2007, p. 258). Thus irrespective of descriptors and funding agendas, and national cultural and historical trends and idiosyncrasies, their practice draws on whatever creative resources they have, responding with their humanity to help counter-balance those challenges people in their workshops face.

In this way, comparing practice in a range of diverse settings and locations, in two unconnected and socioeconomically contrasting national cultures, my findings frame community participatory arts practice as a praxis phenomenon which eludes the specific influences of culture or context. Although not generalizable from these findings alone, this is a conclusion worthy of further investigation, as noted in the next chapter, the concluding chapter of the thesis.

Chapter 11

Concluding Reflections

Concluding this thesis, in itself a long journey of my own, I reflect on the quality of the process, and what emerges from it that may have implications beyond the PhD project itself. With regard to the study design, and how successfully it offered answers to my original questions, my self-evaluation is on balance positive. Allowing for flexibility and serendipity with an emergent design, and grounding the research processes in ethnography proved effective strategies. I was able to capitalize on the depth of study made possible through opportunities for immersion and absorption, as well as being able to respond to a design challenge by expanding my ambit of focus to include the field research in Mexico. With the increase in scope in the field research I created further challenges in the amounts of high quality data the study was generating, and introduced the complexity of working in, but also thinking comparatively about, a different language and cultural identity, and these added dimensions required substantial additional time and intensity in the analysis stage. In the end the outcomes of my analysis are nevertheless, I hope, interesting, and flow comfortably from the data.

With regard to the limitations and omissions of the study there is much to contemplate. On beginning the project I was convinced that interdisciplinarity was an essential perspective, to explore such an elusive phenomenon. I felt my own interdisciplinary, practice-based background in languages and arts pointed me towards a holistic handling of the project, allowing open-mindedness and giving scope for elision of disciplinary perspectives that might be useful. I learnt however to recognise interdisciplinarity as an extremely challenging precept, which threw up provocation at every stage of the project. The literature review opened up such breadth and diversity in disciplinary lenses through which to approach the subject that it was difficult to fend off disorientation. Every turn in the research narrative spawned daunting possibilities of viewing the findings and handling an interpretation from numerous angles, many of which might be in conflict.

Methodologically I found a haven in anthropological precepts of ethnography. However at the theorising stage of my study I was forced to limit my perspective, because the amount of reading required, to explore the possible avenues suggested by the data in order to fully exploit the mid-level findings, was unfeasible. I could not, for example, explore arts practice theories in order to integrate that perspective into my work; although this would be an obvious avenue for further research explorations. Nor was I able to compare my findings with the theories about other comparable practices in the fields of education, alternative health, reflective practice, or any therapeutic or medical practices. Therefore I have not situated this practice amongst others, instead theorising it using more abstract paradigms from the social science disciplines of anthropology, geography, sociology and psychology. The theoretical analysis I have undertaken is inevitably broad rather than deep. I conclude that the

resulting theorisation is to a degree both shallower and narrower than I would have hoped: it represents a first attempt, which suggests many more possibilities.

Implications for the sector

My mid-level theory has found on-going resonance with research participants, and with other practitioners who have seen it. The research delivered answers to many of my original questions: I have been able to see what it is that many non-professionalised arts practitioners are doing in these settings, and have found common practice characteristics that transcend the significant diversity within my study, in terms of art form specialism, backgrounds of the practitioners, and cultural, linguistic and contextual setting for the work. In this work to-date, diversity has been emphasised and individuality celebrated, discouraging the generation of overarching or underlying, cross-disciplinary practice precepts. The common practice model identified here thus represents a significant breakthrough. It identifies and delineates a new community of practitioners, thus far never recognised as a unified grouping identifiable by their shared practice. The ‘workshop ecology’ and ‘practice assemblage’ present an original conceptualisation, which initiates a fresh discourse in developing a language for participatory arts practice in community settings, one that highlights unifying core characteristics while embracing plurality of expression or execution.

Regarding this outcome reflexively, there has been an impact for practitioners themselves from my engagement with them, and their participation in the study. Reflecting on and discussing their practice in such depth has been

a new experience for many, and brought some self-confessed new insights into their own methods, and those of their peers. The impact of this on their continually developing practice is as yet unknown. The implication for the sector is the potential to begin adopting a shared language for hitherto unrecognised elements of common practice, and to acknowledge a new community-based participatory arts 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998). As noted in a new paper by Hepplewhite (2013), pursuing the development of such a shared language for a commonly shared practice methodology has implications for how the sector might progress strategies for training and professional development, and for quality assurance. These discourses, amongst the most pressing issues facing the sector, might be supported by the findings of this study if the 'participatory arts practice assemblage' and 'workshop ecology' ideas were disseminated widely throughout the sector, for consideration by practitioners and commissioners.

However the particular character of the 'practice assemblage' suggested here, and the qualities of the 'workshop ecology', suggest that direct training in this methodology might be problematic. Since these findings suggest a practice so heavily reliant on intuition, on personal commitment and on the practitioners' individual values and principles, indeed where the very 'otherness' of the individual practitioner might be central to its success, the implications for the professional development agenda might be profound. In the same way that arts practitioners suggested here that directly teaching the values on which they based their practice, in order to embed them at the heart of the 'workshop ecology', was not a suitable approach, so too might training in the methodology of the practice assemblage not be suitable. The methodology here suggests that 'modelling a way of being and doing' was the preferred approach of

practitioners. This then would suggest that 'modelling' the assemblage might be the best approach to professional development.

I suggest, based on the findings presented here, that the sector would benefit from developing apprenticeship models for learning the 'participatory arts practice assemblage'. Involving experienced practitioner-mentors and emergent practitioner apprentices, and including reflective practice in the style of the group discussions in my research design, would strengthen the learning potential within the model. With a critical mass of interest, the findings comprising the 'practice assemblage' could be developed to support a discursive framework for a more cohesive and widely agreed approach to assuring quality within the field. Likewise the ideas could support a discourse in how to progress project evaluation, and the dissemination of discursive (as opposed to prescriptive) quality assurance criteria.

Demonstrating, as it has, similarity in practice characteristics in two unrelated and internationally distant settings, this study poses the further question as to whether the 'participatory arts practice assemblage' and the resulting 'workshop ecology' may be supranational phenomena. More research needs to be conducted to explore this possibility, and the related idea that the 'community of practice' in question might be internationally recognisable, with the suggested emergence of a 'cosmopolitan' community of practitioners (Skinner, 2007).

On a practical level, postulating a transnational (or potentially supranational) model for this practice (crucially one that specifically eschews contextual and definitional differences), and beginning to establish the existence of an international community of practice evident in unrelated countries and

settings, suggests the value of international exchanges of ideas and international professional development opportunities, including across language barriers. Links between practitioners in different contexts might inspire communities of practitioners in one context to reclaim impetus or directions they have lost through oppressive conditions at home: for example the political clarity and motivations amongst the Mexican practitioners could inspire some British practitioners to reclaim an activist purpose in their work.

At policy level, recognition of an international similarity in practice could help promote international discourse, networking and collaboration to support advocacy for the work. The very interdisciplinarity of the practice model could be used to gain visibility and recognition for the practice amongst a wide range of practice fields, and the argument could be made for approaching a diverse range of sectors for resources to support new work. Citing the locally recognisable, but internationally acknowledged practice model could open up avenues for extending institutional support. For example in Mexico the 'health' attributes of the practice could be borrowed from the UK definition – using an articulation of the model as an 'arts and health' practice to argue for a fresh audience with health institutions at home, in the quest for resources.

On the matter of gaining recognition for the complexity and sophistication of this practice, one of the key debates discussed in the literature concerns whether or not to pursue a path towards formal professionalisation of the practice – such as the path taken by arts therapies. The findings of my study are unequivocal on this issue, documenting the voice of practitioners clearly set against professionalisation (where this is understood to include a form of

governance of the practice by set codes, ruling out some approaches and sanctioning others, setting 'clear parameters of behaviors that are understood by the profession to be consistent or inconsistent with the covenant.' (Ponton & Duba, 2009, p. 120)). The very heart of the practice has been shown here to rest in aspects of the work that mark it out as different from others (for example the caring professions), which are governed by such a formal framework or code of practice. This work is built upon intuitive responsiveness, a degree of emotional proximity and exchange with participant collaborators, and more significantly the embracing of risk, experimentation, and the disruption of structures as valuable devices, carefully handled. As a fundamentally non-conforming, even 'transgressive' practice, professionalising the work through the standard route of 'the establishment of training/university programs, a professional organisation, and the development of a code of ethics' (Roberts & Dietrich, 1999; cited in Dileo & Bradt, p.169) seems far from appropriate. This is a practice of resistance, in which practitioners are comfortable providing '*the grit in the oyster*'. To try to formalise and control such a practice, which is built on creative tension and friction in relation to the status quo, would likely destroy some of its key strengths.

Implications for research

For me two interesting research angles emerge particularly clearly from this study. The first lies in the theoretical paradigm of secular ritual used to illuminate the practice assemblage. According to Bell (2004), many scholars attempt and struggle to decode ritual. The difference here is that my study does not seek to decode ritual, but rather it locates ritual practice within the study of

a different practice. This is a study that discovered features of ritual whilst exploring a contemporary creative practice of change-making, and in this sense presents an arts activist application of secular ritual. The combination could be encapsulated in a suggestion or proposal from arts practitioner to project participant such as the following: “Can we play together at making a difference?” Discovering a contemporary exemplar of Turner’s secular ritual theories, and reframing those ideas for a commonly occurring 21st century setting, highlights new applications of Turner’s concepts to illuminate the health and arts practice fields. It could conversely also be regarded a valuable contribution to the field of anthropology, by potentially offering a new lens for the study of Turners’ ideas, and for the study of ritual as a contemporary phenomenon.

Finally, the second and most salient research implication of the study capturing my interest is the conclusion that the individuality, creativity, and ‘otherness’ of the arts practitioner is key to what is nevertheless a recognisable practice pattern. This dichotomy is something I find fascinating, and the ambiguity I have had to entertain throughout this study in order to comprehend this reality has been edifying. I hope to be able to pursue the implications of this finding further, for an understanding of the place of art, creativity and the artist in relation to society, culture and change, in our contemporary world.

Coda: Study impact

Since completing this research there have already been developments in its direct application in the practice field. I have received several invitations to

present the workshop ecology and practice assemblage in the UK and abroad, and the reception to the ideas, both amongst practitioners and amongst academics, has been enthusiastic. Presenting to a large audience of policy makers and community leaders at a specially-convened event (*Premier Foro Internacional – ‘El Arte: Factor de desarrollo humano, social y económico, a partir de las nuevas generaciones’* [First International Forum - ‘Art: factor in human, social and economic development, starting with the next generation’]) in Mexico City in March this year led to a subsequent policy change within the space of a fortnight, and the funding granted to support 130 new community-based participatory arts programmes in the city. Also in Mexico, a seminar to discuss my findings with arts practitioners in Mexico City has initiated an ongoing international dialogue between practitioners seeking a deeper understanding of their intuitive practice.

In the UK I have been commissioned to run a series of reflective ‘training’ workshops for emerging practitioners, introducing the practice as articulated by my findings: the ‘workshop ecology’ and the ‘practice assemblage’. Discussions at conferences have revealed interest from other practitioner sectors (for example nurses, midwives, complementary and alternative therapists, and death celebrants) who recognise the character of the practice assemblage, and are inviting dialogue on a possible application of the model in their own field.

These are all exciting resonances, which attest to the perceived value of the research so far. I hope such developments continue, and that the outcomes for the participatory arts and health sector, both nationally and internationally, can be positive. I would like to close with a very recent, quite poignant email communication from one of the practitioners who participated in the study. In the process of contacting Heather to feed back my findings for comment, and

offer her the chance to see how I had used her contributions in the thesis, she expressed interest in seeing the transcript of our research dialogue. After reading the transcript she immediately replied with the message below. Heather has 30 years experience as a specialist arts and health theatre practitioner, and her generous comments make me optimistic that this research may be of value to the field, for emergent practitioners potentially, but even, perhaps, for those too who are already experts:

Dear Anni

Thank you so much for undertaking this research. I haven't managed to read through the article yet - but a quick glance has shown me just how thorough, unique and valuable your work will be.

I find it difficult to articulate and write about my work - but I was amazed and excited (and moved) by the transcript. Through your sensitive and informed questioning I was able to think about aspects of the work I had never really considered let alone found the words for. I am so grateful to you for helping me do that - and when I'm stuck for something to say I now have the transcript!

Thanks again Anni,

Heather

(Personal email, 15/5/13)



Figure 11.1: The journey continues...

Appendix

Research Respondents

Key to art form areas and experience levels, used in tables												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	P
Art form	Multi-artform	Visual art	Drama/story	Writing	New Media eg animation, radio	Illustrator	Video/film	3D, sculpture	Dance	Performance	Music	Project Director
Experience levels of practitioners:	s:		Senior, or long experience			m:	Mid-career, established		j:	Junior - under 30 or new to field		

Table 1	UK informants phase 1																
Research respondent Participation type	Mary	All	Lou	Dan	Peter	ALICE	Luce	Talya	Kay	Gilly	Heather	Incy	James	Chris	Deborah	Dom	RICCI
Previous contact?	Y		y		y	y	y	y	y			y		y		y	y
Previously evaluated - convenience?	Y		Y					y	y			y					
Previously known by reputation - purposive?	Y	Y	Y	Y	y	y	y	y	y			y		y	y	y	y
Snowball recommend?				Y						y	y		y		y		
Opportunistic contact																	
Snowball fr new contact																	
Artform areas	1, 3	2	2	3, 4	4	3	5	6	5	2	3	2	6	3, 5	P, 2	11	4, 11
Gender	f	f	f	m	m	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	m	m	f	m	m
Experience level	s	s	s	m	s	m	j	j	j	s	s	j	j	s	s	m	m
Dialogue?	y	y								y	y						
Skype interview?																	
Group Discussion?	1,2, E	5	3,4, E	4, E	1,2	1,2	2,	1,2, 3	1					3	3	4	4
Journal?					y	y	y	y									
Observed?	Y		y	y				y	y	y		y	y	y		y	y
Dvd/archive?	y		y														

Table 2:	Mexican informants														
Research respondent	Vlady	Guillermo	Daniel	Moni	Alan	CARLOS	MANUEL	MARIA	JUAN	Benjamin	ALONSO	RAFAEL	Isaac	LILIANA	Cecilia
Participation type															
Previous contact?															
Previously evaluated - convenience?															
Known by reputation - purposive?															
Snowball recommend															
Opportunistic contact	y												y		
Snowball fr new contact		y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y		y	y
Artform areas	7/ 11	3	2	2	2	P	8	9	8	P	2	2	3	1 0	3
Gender	m	m	m	f	m	m	m	f	m	m	m	m	m	f	f
Experience level	m	s	m	j	m	s	s	m	s	s	m	s	j	m	s
Dialogue?		y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	
Skype interview?	y														y
Group Discussion?															
Journal?															
Observed?		y	y	y	y		y		y			y			
Dvd/archive?		y						y						y	
other													y		y

Table 3:	UK Informants phase 2 (post-Mexico)								
Research participant / Participation type	Amy	LANCE	Ruth	Lou A	Bryan	Cath	EVE	Tony	LESTER
Previous contact?	y	y	y						
Previously evaluated?									
Known by reputation?	y	y	y			y			
Snowball recommend				y			y	y	y
Opportunistic contact					Y				
Snowball fr new contact									
Artform areas	2	9	3	1	8, 5	5	2	8	11
Gender	f	m	f	f	m	f	f	m	m
Experience level	m	j	m	m	s	m	s	m	s
Dialogue?	y	y					y		
Skype interview?			y						
Group Discussion?				5			5	5	5
Journal?									
Observed?	y	y	y	y	y	y		y	
Dvd/archive?									

Practitioner Credits

UK:

James Allot
Lou Andrews
Talya Baldwin
Ruth Ben-Tovim
Lucy Bergman
Philip Charles
Ali Clough
Carry Franklin
Amy Hield
Katy Hayley
Dan Mallagan
Dominic Moore
Deborah Munt
Leo Nolan
Mary Robson
Gilly Rogers
Kath Shackleton
Peter Spafford
Chris Squire
Tony Stephenson
Lou Sumray
Lloyd Thompson

Philippa Troutman
Bryan Tweddle
Heather Wilson
Incy Wood

Mexico:

Miriam Alvarez
Cecilia Andres
Vlady Díaz
Guillermo Díaz Madrid
Javier Muños
Miguel Peña
Lorena Wollfer
Alan
Argel
Benjamín
Daniel
Moni
Octavio
Israel
José Luis

The above arts practitioners contributed generously to the research in this thesis: their practice, and personal and professional reflections, form the basis for the analysis and interpretations presented, and as such the findings are our collaborative outcome. Heartfelt thanks to you all.

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